MARCEL PROUST IN 1893

LETTERS OF

MARCEL PROUST

TO

ANTOINE BIBESCO

Translated
and Introduced by
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THAMES AND HUDSON
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PREFACE

BY GERARD HOPKINS

In one of the prefatory notes printed in this volume, the late Antoine Bibesco wrote: "Should a day ever come when the world at large wishes to know something of Proust's countless acts of generosity and kindness, someone may undertake to write a monograph on what his friendship meant. These letters may then be of service."

That day came for Proust's old friend rather sooner than might have been expected. To the Summer Number of the "Cornhill Magazine" for 1950, *he contributed an essay. He called it "The Heartlessness of Marcel Proust", and the opening paragraph sounds a note very different from the gentleness of his editorial comments. "The prodigious wave", he wrote, "of what one is tempted to call 'Proustolatry' shows no sign of receding—none at least if I am entitled to judge by my own correspondents. I am understood to have been the friend of Proust . . . Marcel's inquisitiveness, a curiosity never satisfied, and, at times, exasperating, has been repaid a hundredfold."*

The letters do, indeed, seem to have been of service. Perhaps, re-reading them for publication, the recipient experienced a revelation comparable to that found by Proust in his famous "cup of tea", and saw the past emotionally, and not as conscious memory had embalmed it. Heartlessness is not, perhaps, the exact word to express the atmosphere that they distil. But they do, without a doubt, convey an atmosphere of distress, of exigence, almost of bullying, which is noticeable in all Proust's epistolatry relations with his friends. Except, perhaps, when he wrote to Madame Straus, he seems always, indirectly, and as though speaking from

the muffling intricacies of an elaborate sensitiveness, to have demanded in the very act of giving or of offering. There must have been many occasions when his friends groaned under the weight of his affection, when they would willingly have broken free from his adhesive possessiveness. Not the simplest request for a meeting could be made without complications of difficulty which might well have frightened the fondest intimate into deliberate absence. Offers of help or sympathy from the cloistered invalid were so hedged about with conditions, so elaborated into impossible configurations of feeling, that every proposal became an insistence that sacrifice should be accepted with the full knowledge that it would involve the giver in torments of conscious stoicism. When, for instance, after the death of Princess Bibesco, Marcel seriously (or with seeming seriousness) suggested that he could best comfort his friend by making a journey of condolence to Rumania, it is almost as though he were threatening him with additional miseries instead of seeking how best to heal his wounds.

Much has been written about the "imaginary" nature of Proust's illness. That it caused him genuine distress both of body and of mind is no proof that its origins did not lie in auto-suggestion, nor that this man of genius did not use his asthma as a weapon with which to keep at bay all possible intruders on his privacy. That genuinely organic trouble had undermined his health can scarcely be doubted, but neither can the fact that he deliberately exploited the advantages to be derived from living in a sick-room. In the Dedication to "Les Plaisirs et les Jours", published in 1896 *when he was twenty-five, he wrote: "When I was a child, the fate of no historical figure seemed to me more miserable than that of Noah who was confined to his Ark by the Flood for forty days. But, later, I was often ill, and condemned, like him, to remain*

for long periods in an Ark of my own. It was then that I understood what a wonderful view of the world Noah had been able to command from his Ark, even though he was fast shut in, and though darkness was upon all the earth." Shut in his Ark, Marcel Proust produced a work of genius which will outlast the passing years, but his seclusion, however necessary for the writing of the book to which he gave his life, took necessary toll of him. More and more he lived within himself, less and less could he tolerate any invasion from the world that lay outside his cork-lined room. But, shut away though he was, he could not face the possibility of being forgotten. Hence, the endless flow of letters to his friends, hence the tyrannical demands he made upon them. His pen became an instrument of domination, and theory strengthened it.

Proust never grew tired of telling his intimates that the "I" of the novel was not himself. That, no doubt, is true so far as incident is concerned. But it is impossible not to fasten on him responsibility for those "general laws" which his Narrator deduced from the experiences of life. It can scarcely be maintained that the views of love and friendship, so exquisitely elaborated and analysed through many volumes of A La Recherche du Temps perdu *were not his own. All the evidence goes to show that they were, and all the evidence is in agreement that for Proust, as for the central character of his novel, love and friendship were purely subjective emotions. Having, therefore, to impose himself from his sick-bed, and believing not at all in the existence outside himself of the qualities in others which he adored and cherished, it was but natural that he should take refuge in a ceaseless flow of letters.*

It seems likely that he put off the visits of his friends not only because of his fevers and his fumigations, but because too sharp a contact with the "vessels", which he had filled with the desired

density and colour of emotion, would have shattered the self-induced solitude in which his inner life (like Japanese paper flowers in water) could burgeon and expand. In letters he could be central, obeying only his own feelings, his own insistence, his own moods. The reality of his friends might have dissipated the mists of sensitive affection. Letters provided contact—but only at second hand. Only by being "difficult" could he still manage to establish himself as a continuing presence in the world he had forsaken. Some such obscure and only half-realized motive seems to have been at the bottom of an attitude which made of him one of the most exacting, tormenting and obsessive friends that any man can have had.

Throughout this volume the arrangement of letters has been left as Antoine Bibesco made it. Many of them are obviously misplaced, and on two occasions the reader's attention has been drawn to internal evidence which falsifies the dates given. No one can say that the letters themselves are easy reading. Many are concerned with the intimate events and emotions of a closely-knit circle. Prince Antoine Bibesco was chary of explanatory notes, and only he, in many instances, could really illuminate the darkness. But style, no less than matter, makes here for difficulty. Proust knew, and often admitted, that his literary manner was involved, undulating and far from clear. He was ever a bad proof-reader where printing was concerned, and these letters, not intended for publication, can seldom have been re-read before he posted them. Almost always they were written from his bed, and not seldom when his temperature was high. Though, therefore, I may stand convicted of many infelicities, or, perhaps, misunderstandings, there are still obscurities for the creation of which I plead "not guilty".

GERARD HOPKINS

DEDICATION

Dear Marcel:

you will feel no surprise at my publishing these few letters of yours. You are not here to re-read them and to add your comments. You are with those many who have passed from us—with Reynaldo Hahn, Lucien Daudet and René Peter.

A handful of us, your contemporaries, still remain—Fernand Gregh, Robert de Billy, Léon Blum, André Gide. But we shall not be here long: as the inscription on the sundial says—"It is Later than You Think".

I am conscious of your presence. You resurrect for me those human beings who were part of your life, who counted for so much in mine: Mamma, Elizabeth, Emmanuel. But for them I should not exist at all, should count for nothing. But for them, and but for you, I should not have been able to present myself as a witness to times past. The absence of some people is as powerful as their presence. A friend asked me the other day, speaking of Emmanuel whom you were so fortunate as to know—

"When was it you lost your brother?"

"I lose him", I replied, "with every day that passes."

Divine resurrection brought by grief; time which need not be lost to be regained: time which no suffering can injure: time untouched by change: time thanks to which you, too, come back to life.

To-day and Always

ANTOINE BIBESCO

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

"Antoine Bibesco is the only person who understands me"— wrote Marcel Proust in a letter which was published nine years after his death. The phrase delights me. But it imposes certain duties.

For those who would understand the letters here presented, some explanation is necessary: primarily a geographical one. Marcel Proust lived at 45, rue de Courcelles; I at 69.

One had only to know Marcel Proust slightly to realize that he was one of the most intelligent men in the world.

When I first met him, his response was so charming that I felt encouraged to continue the acquaintance. This, since he was always at home, was easy.

How did that first meeting come about?

My mother, who was mad about music, and herself no inconsiderable performer, was hospitality and kindness incarnate. She surrounded herself with persons who were exquisitely gifted— musicians, artists, writers. I remember hearing her play duets with Saint-Saëns and Fauré. Paderewski made his first public appearance at her house, as did Enesco, of whose career she was the architect.

As a child, I had the wonderful experience of being present on an occasion when Gounod and Delibes sang to their own piano accompaniment. Anatole France and Jules Lemaître frequently dined at our house, and Pierre Loti, too, whenever he happened to be in Paris. I can recollect Renan coming to autograph his books, and I have a vivid memory of Leconte de Lisle's skull (it was hard for a child to accept the fact that a poet could be so bald), of Maeterlinck, of Doumic, and of others.

My mother counted among her friends the painter Bonnat, several other young artists, Bonnard, Vuillard, Aristide Maillol, Cottet and Odilon Redon, Massenet and Debussy, as well as diplomats—Prince Ourousoff, the Russian Ambassador, Count Tornielli, the Italian, Count Wolkenstein, the Austrian, Monson, the English, and many more. I cannot begin to enumerate her French friends.

It was only natural that a man like Marcel Proust, always so curious about Society, should wish to have the entrée to my mother's Salon.

At one of her evenings, when I was a young man, I was struck by the appearance of a guest with a slight stoop. He had an abundance of brown hair, a very pale face, and eyes like Japanese lacquer. He offered me his hand. There are many ways of shaking hands. It is not too much to say that it is an art. He was not good at it. His hand was soft and drooping (I often teased him about it later). There was nothing pleasant about the way he performed the action. When we knew one another better, I gave him an illustration of how one ought to shake hands—firmly, with a strong clasp.

"If I followed your example", he objected, "people would take me for an invert."

Our friendship did not begin at once. Shortly after our first meeting I went off to do my military service. But meanwhile, my brother Emmanuel had come to be on intimate terms with him. A love of Ruskin and of Gothic cathedrals brought them together.

Dear Emmanuel!—there has never been anyone like him for intelligence, moral and mental qualities, and a kindly generosity which I have not seen equalled—and all this accompanied by the modesty, the desire for self-effacement of a saint!

He was one of the few persons whom Marcel really loved.

Since it was to him that I owed my own friendship with Marcel

Proust, it is but logical that I should produce evidence of the place he occupied in Marcel's life. Here is a passage from a letter written to Marie Scheikevitch:

"Emmanuel Bibesco's death has shaken me profoundly, though it scarcely came as a surprise. I had long guessed and foretold that it would happen, as Céleste, and possibly Morand, know. I was surprised only a week ago at hearing Brancovan and Beaumont speak of him so optimistically. I only wished that what they said might prove true. But, foreseen or not, such a misfortune loses none of its power to break the heart of one whom death should have taken rather than Emmanuel . . ."

And another from a letter to Lucien Daudet:

"The death of Emmanuel Bibesco, on which, night after night, I miserably brood."

Lastly, there is an unpublished letter which Prince Marc de Chimay—the son of my second cousin, Hélène de Chimay—has been kind enough to show me.

Marcel's grief does more to display the depth of his affection for Emmanuel than will the few letters to him included here.

LETTERS

to

The Princesse de Caraman-Chimay

Emmanuel Bibesco

and

Princess Bibesco

A letter from Marcel Proust to the Princesse de Caraman-Chimay, written on the day after Emmanuel Bibesco's death.

1917

Princess:

My weak eyes make it difficult for me to write. Such use of them as is left me I have to-day exhausted on behalf of Antoine.

We have so often spoken together, you, Princess, and I, of Emmanuel, and you have told me about him (about his kindness, his self-forgetfulness, his intelligence, and about the pleasure you have found in visiting cathedrals in his company) so many charming, so many memorable things, that, recollecting them, I cannot refrain from sending you a line. I have never found it possible to think of him without, at the same time, thinking of you, so that now I cannot weep for him without associating you in my grief, without asking you to let me join in yours. I know that you belong to that rare race of beings—the only ones worthy of respect and commiseration—in whose hearts the dead live on, who can never habituate themselves to the dread anachronism of memory. I saw you when the Prince de Polignac died, and can, without difficulty, imagine what you must be feeling to-day. I don't want to speak to you of a death which I, alas, foresaw only too soon, only too accurately. All I want to say to you now is this. Should it be that you have not seen Antoine since his brother's death, I want you to know that he repaid to Emmanuel, with an almost maternal tenderness, all the

kindnesses which he had received from him. I would very much rather you said nothing of all this to Antoine, who read a great deal more than I ever meant into something I said, which you repeated, on the occasion of his mother's death. Besides, he well knows how deeply touched I was by his behaviour to his brother the only time when I saw them together in the course of Emmanuel's illness—if, indeed, I can call it "seeing". Antoine, whom I had never asked for news of his brother because he had never told me he was ill, came one evening with Morand to fetch me. "Emmanuel", he said, "is downstairs. He stayed in the car because he doesn't want anyone to see him." When we got downstairs, Emmanuel, without leaving the car, insisted, out of politeness, in moving over to one of the bracket seats. How I wish you could have been a witness of the authoritative manner (so tender, yet so imperious) with which Antoine made him change back again, saying, in order to make him feel that it was the most natural thing in the world for him to do so, and also to shield him from the draught,—"the brothers Bibesco will take the back seat". I doubt whether I can convey to you the nobility as well as the sweetness of the incident. All I know is that, had it been necessary for me to say something at that moment, I should not have been able to do so for the lump in my throat. Then Emmanuel said with a laugh—"the coachman had better drive backwards so that Marcel Proust and Morand may feel that they are facing the horses". It was the only thing he said, but I spent all that night shedding bitter tears which only my housekeeper saw, who did not realize until to-day the reason for them. A little later, I had good news of him—Morand had lunched with him two weeks before

in London; Beaumont had been with him to look at a church—such good news as gave me reason to hope that, for once in my life, I might have been wrong in my presentiment of disaster.

Good bye, Princess. If I could see you without making a nuisance of myself, I need hardly tell you how happy I should be to do so. Unfortunately, the state of my health is such that I never know beforehand when I shall be able to leave my bed.

Good bye. Please remember me to the Prince, and

believe me

Your respectful and devoted admirer

MARCEL PROUST

Of all the letters which Marcel wrote to my brother, I have found only the following.

The dates are approximate. Some are the result of pure guesswork, because Marcel Proust never dated his letters. He had recently borrowed Maeterlinck's Temple enseveli.

1904

Dear Emmanuel:

you did not know what you were giving me this evening, or, if you did, are—to use the words spoken by Oedipus to Theseus—the most generous of mortals. *Le Temple enseveli* is a repository of treasures, and, in simple honesty, I must return it, like one who, having been given a small bag which, opened,

is found to contain precious stones, feels that it would be wrong for him to keep it.

Whatever may ultimately be decided about the final resting place of *Le Temple enseveli*, it is a matter of friendly urgency that I send it back to you, that you then return it to me, that I then return it to you, so that in this constant interchange of book and comments, each may feel, as feel he should, that it rests in our joint ownership.

I am very much afraid that Antoine did not read my letter.

I have had his answer. But I have already read the future, which is as good as reading *in* the future, though the one does not necessarily provide the means of doing the other.

Many thanks.

Yours

MARCEL PROUST

My Dear Emmanuel:

I am sure I need only ask that a letter be regarded as *strictly confidential*, to feel quite sure that, even though you may find it impossible to accede to my request, you will say nothing of what I have written to anybody else. Therefore, without waiting until I get your reply, I will go ahead.

You would be doing me a great service, or, rather, you would be giving me the *great* pleasure of being able to do a service to somebody else, if, for the next two or three weeks, you would be so very kind as to tell me the names of your fellow-guests at the dinners or parties to which you go. These would appear in the *Figaro* with, or without, your name,

though I have an idea that since, even if your name were suppressed people would still guess that you were the source of my information, it had better remain. In any case, no one shall ever know that it was you who passed on the information. I know that this will be an awful bore for you, and scarce dare to hope that you will agree, but, should you do so, you would be rendering me a very great service. It is just possible that I may be going out to-night, in which case I might give you a ring; but if you could send me an express letter containing the sort of information for which I have asked, covering—since this will be the first of a series of such letters—the two or three days just past, it would please me much. Even if you can't make a regular thing of it, but could let me have what I am asking for to-day, some time before dinner or, better still, by half past four, that, for me, would be perfect.

It occurs to me that I have always been very inquisitive about your movements in the great world, and that you may think of my request as belonging to the same order of curiosity. But that, my dear friend, is far from the truth, and the resemblance is pure coincidence. I need hardly say that, should you play any tricks on me, such as including sham names in your list, the results might, from my point of view, be extremely embarrassing. I very much hope that you will do nothing of the sort.[1]

Yours

MARCEL PROUST

[1] I was never able to discover why Marcel made the request contained in this letter.

Dear Emmanuel:

It was kind of you to answer me in such detail. I entirely fail to understand the reason for your attitude, but, since any request necessarily implies the possibility of a refusal, I shall not pass judgment. However difficult to grasp, it must be excellent, because you are the kindest and the best of friends. I won't say that I am happy in your refusal, because I regret my consequent inability to render a service to a friend. I should, however, hate to ask of your friendship anything more than the pleasure and delight it gives me, for the which I am eternally grateful.

De cœur à vous

MARCEL PROUST

1903 Sunday

Dear Emmanuel:

if you could come *this* evening (before a quarter past eleven) it would give me great pleasure. Since you are so mysterious, and nothing has occurred to make you so—but why the change?—we won't mention the unexpected trip (cf Reg-nard's *Unexpected Return*) which you kept wrapped in secrecy for fear—a groundless fear I assure you—that I might have suggested going with you. But in any case, my dear friend, I should dearly love to shake you by the hand, and that is a thing I can do less and less often these days because of the wretched existence I am condemned to lead. I won't ask you

to bring the Porch of Chartres on one arm and the Towers of Laon on the other—easy though such a feat would be for one of your titanic strength, who, as a matter of fact, likes nothing better than such heroic upheavals. No, all I ask you to bring is your charm, that exquisite charm which can give so much pleasure to

Your

MARCEL PROUST

Was it you who rang my bell yesterday, round about midnight? I thought I recognised the semi-quaver of the first ring, and, as you know, the sound announcing your arrival is sweeter to my ears than any serenade. But I was in no fit state to come down, everyone having gone to bed, and almost immediately I heard the outer door bang and realised that, for me, it meant what your god would call, in memory of a volume of very bad verse, a *Happiness Missed.*[1]

Until this evening, then, *very* early (nine o'clock).

M.P.

[1] *Bonheur manqué*—a book of poems by Porto-Riche.

1903

Dear Emmanuel:

I expect you have got my note by this time begging you for archaeologico-aesthetic information on the subject of

Normandy, and, in particular, of Brittany.[1] If, as I hope, your reply has not yet been posted, do, please, answer the following question: is Queen Mathilde's tapestry at Bayeux really beautiful and interesting? I went to Bayeux yesterday, but couldn't see it. Is it worth the effort of a second trip? I have been to Caen, to Bayeux and to Balleroy. I thought of you both all the time.

Your devoted friend

MARCEL PROUST

[1] This was probably written on the occasion of Marcel Proust's first visit to these provinces.

Grand Hotel: Cabourg

Dear Emmanuel:

many thanks for your charming card: it makes me so happy to know that you liked my little article.[1] It was sweet of you to tell me so. I have been for the past week at Cabourg (Grand Hotel), using it as a centre for excursions to various churches up and down Normandy. If you know of any views or monuments particularly worth seeing, do drop me a line. But do it quickly, because I shall be moving on to Brittany very soon. I expect you can keep me posted about several especially thrilling places there, too. You'd be astonished at the amount of travelling I'm doing. But it won't last! I've seen nothing but a few beautiful buildings. Guiche, who is within motoring distance, introduced me to two ladies the other day who caused me considerable embarrassment, so

much, indeed, that it occurred to me later what a good turn I might have done myself by mentioning you—the Baroness d'Erlanger and Mademoiselle de Saint-Sauveur. They must have found me quite unbelievably stupid, but *I* thought *them* charming, and have been thinking about them a great deal. I hope that Antoine is well, unruffled, hard at work and happy—everything, in fact, that I am not! I have never been so restless, so sterile or so unhappy. But he has so much to look forward to that he cannot help being well, contented and laborious. I have an idea that I might be able to help him a good deal, because I *know* what's good though I don't seem able to act on my knowledge, and, anyhow, it's no longer a matter of any importance to me.

My dear friend, I really am devoted to you both and send my fondest thoughts. Victor Hugo said what I mean a great deal better—"*ma pensée, la chose la meilleure que j'ai en moi.*"

MARCEL PROUST

[1] In the *Figaro*.

1904 Night of Tuesday/Wednesday

My Dear Emmanuel:

I have matters of importance to tell you. Unfortunately, I am going out to-night (as a matter of fact, that's why I have matters of importance to tell you), which means that to-morrow, Wednesday (to-day, by the time this note reaches you) I shall be in one of my states, and in no condition to see

anybody. But do, please, ring me up about half past nine in the evening. If I am capable of speech, I may perhaps ask you to come round. If you get the concierge on the line, ask her to come up and tell me that you are telephoning, unless, that is, I happen to be asleep or fumigating. But if you are engaged for the evening, we can easily postpone the meeting for a few days. I needn't say that when I speak of "matters of importance", I mean matters that concern you. I know, alas, that what concerns me is no longer of the slightest importance to anybody, now that my parents are dead.[1]

Mille amitiés.

MARCEL PROUST

[1] The dating of this letter must be wrong, because Proust's mother did not die until 1905. (Translator)

Mon cher ami:

if the Brancovans have not, once and for all, killed any feeling you may have had for me, I should dearly like a meeting *à deux*, a brief period of uninterrupted intimacy in which I could look at your cathedrals, those symbols so precisely eloquent of your nature which, solemn where ideas are concerned, sarcastic where people, finds, I am sure, in ogive traceries something which expresses its devotion for the former, its irony for the latter, making its own the richness of Choirs and storied statuary, pushing skywards its ardent questioning in a thrust the extent of which I have not yet accurately gauged, though I never cease from wondering at its power and its faith in the intertwined harmony of complementary and endlessly

varied aspiration. At the moment, it is your cathedrals, your photographs, that I want to see. My own *Book of Hours*—which is the title used by one of my enemies for his articles[1]—has been modified. I get up about two or three o'clock, lunch about four, and should be ready—if I have not already gone for the afternoon to Versailles or elsewhere, when your answer comes, assuming you have written—to see you at any hour of any day you may choose. Perhaps, though, we should not recognize one another, having become accustomed to meeting only after dark.

Always

MARCEL PROUST

[1] Albert Flament.

(*Emmanuel had sent Marcel a copy of the* Imitation.)

Dear Emmanuel:

I have just, this moment, received the edifying and precious brochure—sure cause of the war in China—which embarrasses me the more since I shall find the utmost difficulty in returning it to you. The ravishing dedication has the defect of being indelible, and anyone, finding it on your shelves, would most certainly take it for a book of mine which you were wrongfully retaining, and that would be the last straw. I am infinitely grateful for your charming and unusual gift; a gift so worthy of the sender. Bibesco the Magnificent overwhelms me with the subtle, the superb, marks of his favour. How to acknowledge, how to thank, I do not know. I feel

more of gratitude than I can express: and, since that word Magnificent brings to mind the Medicis, the ridiculous but celebrated lines:

Medici le reçut avec indifférence
Et comme accoutumé à de pareils présents[1]

voice a state of mind precisely the opposite of the one I am, faced by your Imitation, conscious of. I have, on the subject of saturnism arrived at a number of profound reflexions, and these I shall communicate to you when next we meet for metaphysical discussion. I need hardly tell you that they are of an extreme severity. But I still admit to a philosophical curiosity about persons. When one has to deal with an imbecile almost the only thing worth knowing about him is whether he is anti-Dreyfusard or Saturnian.

I was forgetting, momentarily, that you are in the country, and therefore less than usually sympathetic to idle chatter. "It would set even the greatest talkers dreaming" wrote Monsieur de Balzac (the 17th century one). (He was referring to a canal.) So I stop talking and silently press your hand.

Your truly grateful

MARCEL PROUST

[1] Indifferently the Medicis received it
As those accustomed to such noble gifts.

1904

Dear friend:

I write to thank you for your exquisite letter and for your kind invitation to luncheon, which reached me at half past

MARCEL PROUST'S FATHER

six, or seven. But I am taking advantage of the fact that my concierge is going out on an errand to let you know that I am ill, and to say that should you, this evening, when you get back from the Théatre Antoine, or whatever—for I scarcely dare hope that you will be free earlier—feel inclined to pay me a visit (before one o'clock), it would be a real pleasure for me. Even at one, it would still be very agreeable. Don't please, pay me compliments. I feel much affection for you and very little for myself. Consequently, you would please me much more by saying—"You're asking a lot" instead of sending messages which could be aimed only at pleasing my self-love, if I had any.

Your friend

MARCEL PROUST

I am feeling sad. Bergson is too tired to dine with me. We will discuss once more the possibility of your meeting him, in my company, in his own house—which would be easy to arrange.

1904

Dear friend:

that way you have of saying "You're asking a lot" always delights me, even when I believe it to be deliberate. The power charm has over us is independent of our realization that it is illusory: it outlives that, and when, at long last, it ceases to operate, the reason, as a rule is, something quite

different which has its origins in the affections. Besides, any deliberate action you might undertake with the object of assuring yourself of my friendship, would, in itself, be so flattering a proof of yours, that I should find believing it very difficult. You have other expressions in the same category as "asking a lot", which are no less certain in their effect, but I have always preferred not to tell you what they are, so as not to spoil (you being blissfully unaware) the success of such innocent tactics. (To sum up: you can come at any hour up to half past twelve: I shall be expecting you; but the earlier you can come, the better.)

Till to-night, then, but try to make it before midnight, and not later than half after. But if this arrangement is going in any way to put you out, don't come. I love seeing you.

MARCEL PROUST

1904

Dear Emmanuel:

I really do believe that Wednesday will be possible, and that I shall be able to see you at the hour you suggest. . . . As to the cathedrals—which, when I had legs to walk with, I used to visit, each in its remote and sacred site—could they not—now that the friend who loved them can travel no more—be persuaded to pay me some evening, with a touching unanimity of kindness, in the form of your invaluable photographs, the visits I so often paid to them? Such an act on their

part might, I think, be made the subject of a story, dressed up as an "Old French Legend" for the benefit of those "sensitive souls" who find a "fragrance" in such things. But even so trusty and charming a Titan as you, would find the task of carrying all those tympanums, of moving all those vaulted ceilings, of shifting those many towers, rather tiring. Perhaps a time will come, if my health improves, when, before going back to Amiens, Chartres and Rheims, I can come and see the cathedrals in your own home, where your thoughts will give then an ambience of poetry. How lovely it would be for me thus to link poetry and friendship.

Always

M.P.

1904

Dear Friend:

I have decided not to go to bed to-day. Consequently, I shall be visible this evening. All the same, I shall try to get a little sleep this afternoon. The best plan would be for you to drop in before you go to the Dreyfuses.[1] But if you can't manage to do this before, afterwards would be just as good. On the whole I am inclined to think that immediately after your dinner, or immediately before (preferably after) would be better.

If, some time to-day—I am in a terrible state of nerves because I allowed myself to get over-tired—you can give me

the great pleasure of a visit, it will mean real happiness for me. If I am sleeping when you come, return later.

A line from you giving the precise hour of your arrival would please me much, because, in that case, I could go to sleep with a quiet mind in the assurance that you wouldn't turn up the very next moment.

If you can't manage one o'clock, or two, or three, or later still, then I would rather you made it some time not earlier than seven or nine this evening, which will give me a longer interval in which to rest. If I must choose, then my preference is for half-past-eight. If you come on your way back from the Dreyfuses, bring Reynaldo with you: I shall probably send him a note in any case. But tell him that I shall be sleeping in the afternoon.

Affectionately

M.P.

[1] Great collectors of Renaissance sculpture.

All the letters written by Marcel Proust to Elizabeth have, unfortunately (with one single exception) been lost . . . but he has left a number of references to her.

It was Emmanuel's great wish that I should marry Elizabeth Asquith. "She is the only person", he said, "who could stand up to Anna" (de Noailles).

This wish of his I fulfilled, for I was in love with Elizabeth. But my mind was not altogether easy. One can never be sure that one's relations with other people may not become strained when someone new is introduced into the closed circle of intimates. What,

for instance, would be the upshot of an Elizabeth-Marcel Proust "conjunction"?

My fears were quickly dissipated.

One evening I took my wife to see Marcel Proust. From the very first moment they showed as an admirably assorted couple.

We started talking at ten o'clock and did not stop until midnight.

Elizabeth and I went back to our house on the Quai Bourbon. A few minutes later there was a ring at the front door. It was Marcel Proust who wanted to ask Elizabeth's opinion on certain passages in Shakespeare.

There are some people who are eloquent, others, who have the gift of speech, but whose words, in addition, seem to glitter. *The brilliance comes not merely from verbal wit, which is a child of the intellect, but from the dazzling radiance shed by intelligence. Among those still living, Jean Cocteau, for example, has this gift. Among those who have left their mark on the memory of the people who knew them, I would mention—in France, Anna de Noailles: in England, in America, and even in Europe, Elizabeth (before she changed her name) Asquith. This was the only point of resemblance between her and the other two I have mentioned. They, fortunately for us, gave much of their thought and time to their work. Elizabeth was the daughter of a man without ambition, and she had none herself, though she wrote stories, novels, plays and poems—in all, achieving perfection with a strange facility.*

She completely dazzled Marcel Proust.

To his friends, the Schiffs, he wrote, in a letter which was published after his death,—"There is no one like Elizabeth Asquith."

He held up the printing of his book in order to interpolate, at great expense, the following passage:

"Another great wedding delayed the arrival of the King of England . . . Miss Asquith, who was probably unsurpassed in intelligence by any of her contemporaries, and who looked like a lovely figure in an Italian fresco, married Prince A. Bibesco, who

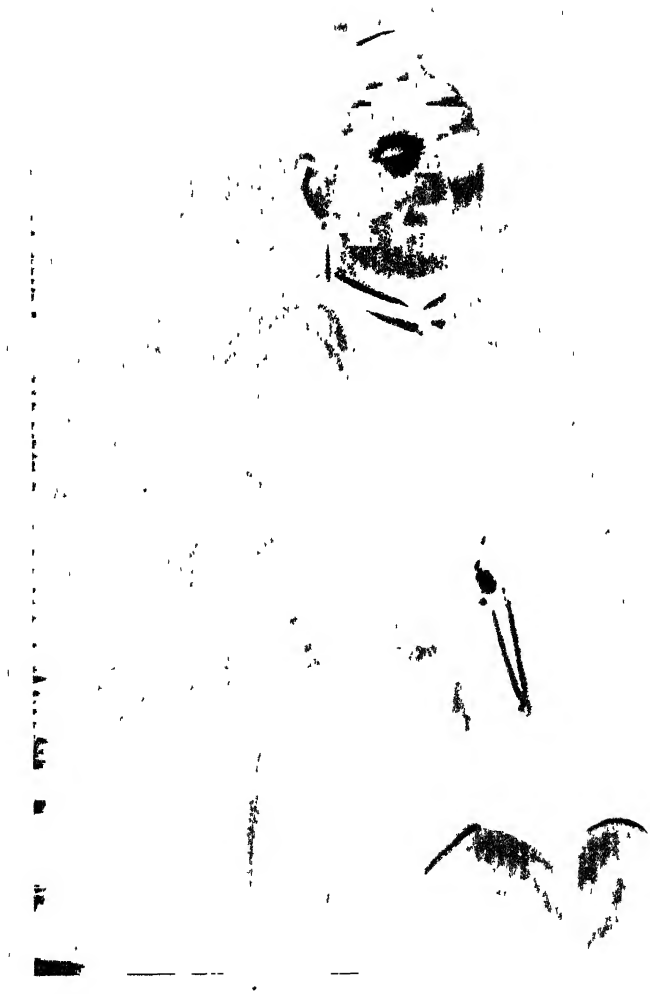
was the idol of all who knew him. He was a great friend of Morand, who is destined to figure in the course of these Memoirs. He was mine as well. The match made a great sensation and was widely approved. Only a few ill-informed English persons held the belief that Miss Asquith might have made a more brilliant choice. She could, it is true, have had her pick among all the great ones of the earth, but what these critics did not know was that the Bibescos, like the Noailles, the Montesquious, the Chimays and the Bauffremonts, all belong to the House of Capet, and can legitimately claim to stand in the line of succession to the Throne of France."

To Elizabeth he owed one of the last pleasures of his life, for it was she who sent him from America the earliest reviews of Swann, *all of them lyrical in their praise. (Schiff-Marcel Proust Correspondence.)*

1919 Friday

Princess:

I am suffering from a touch of otitis (you may remember that I had a pain in my ear the other evening). The effect of this is to give a *certain* (I was going to add *uncertainty*) to my plans. All the doctors are out of town, but I did manage to get hold of one to-night who has arranged to call in a specialist to-morrow. He will decide whether what I am suffering from is really otitis, or whether there are merely some fragments of wax in my ear which I could not myself remove. I can't, until all this is over, ask you to dine with me at the Ritz one evening which my present trouble must leave vague, but perhaps Sunday, or Monday, or later. It is impossible for



MARCEL PROUST'S MOTHER

me to go into details now because the pain is so bad that lying in bed has become quite insupportable.

Princess, I never talk about myself. If I have done so now it is because I want you to realize that my longing to see you—and Antoine—has not been weakened but only frustrated by this tiny but intolerable affliction. I think of you continually. Only now, for the first time since the other evening, can I recall the beauty produced by the balanced composition of your features and your hair. It's not that I didn't, before that meeting, remember you, but that I hadn't before my mind's eye, as I have now, a sufficiently clear picture of your calm, strong presence. You have everything that I lack. I know that, and my realization that I know it is the form that my admiration takes.

Respectueusement à vous

MARCEL PROUST

What a happiness it will be for me to see again that evocation of St. Mark's which I always find at 45, Quai Bourbon.[1]

[1] The gilded walls of our house on the Quai Bourbon reminded Marcel of the mosaics in Venice.

LETTERS

to

ANTOINE BIBESCO

In the following letter Marcel Proust shows how great his friendship and sense of compassion could be.

1903

My Dear Antoine:

I am ill (caught a chill) and in bed. I feel so on edge lying here that it would be really kind of you to look in for a moment, either before you go out to dinner (now, for instance), or about eleven o'clock on your way home from Madame de Pierrebourg's. I have been meaning for some days to write to you, so here goes. I realize that you dislike my asking for news of Princess Bibesco. *I*, on the other hand, very much dislike having none, and also being without any answers to the questions which I ceaselessly ask myself.

Is there anything in your mother's condition that causes you anxiety, anything, I mean, which leads you to suppose that, once she is cured, there will be any after-effects of her present trouble?

Don't you think that if you could put off your leave and go away with her when she is convalescent—should she need Southern sun—that might be the happiest solution for you?

If that is difficult, or if you feel that it would be better for your mother—who is in a very nervous condition—not to have you with her when you are restless and irritable, mightn't it calm you down more effectively to go away before she gets back, and thus save her the distress of first returning and then having to say good-bye—an arrangement like Beethoven's Sonata turned upside down?

I know that I am being madly indiscreet, but I can't help worrying, and it would be kind of you to relieve my mind in a brief note, since I know that you don't like talking of these things.

Yours

MARCEL

If you think of turning up about midnight, I will have a key put downstairs for you. Ring three times, don't wait for an answer but come straight up. If you don't find the key, ring. There will be somebody here to open the door for you.

My mother was ill in Rumania. I received the telegram summoning me—but too late. To my great grief I lost her on the 31st October, 1903.

1903 Monday

Mon petit Antoine:

when I think that you wouldn't even let me speak about what I didn't, at the time, know had become a matter of deep anxiety to you, I am afraid that you may be angry at getting this letter from me, and may throw it into the waste-paper basket. I realize only too well that I, and those others, who knew your mother only slightly and cannot remind you of her, have become for you little better than strangers. All the same, do let me say, without in any way intruding on your grief, how utterly the thought of you obsesses me. I

wish, mon pauvre petit, you could know how often since this morning I have followed your journey in imagination, have *seen* the moment when you awoke to the full horror of what has happened, that you had arrived too late, and all that must have followed. The thought of your violent grief fills me with terror. I do so wish that I could be near you without your knowing it. To see you as you are now would make me miserably unhappy, but less so than this state I am in of knowing nothing, of trembling each moment, of telling myself, with each minute that passes, that you are racked with misery. My love for my own mother, my admiration for yours, and the affection I feel for you—all these conspire to make me feel your sufferings more acutely than I thought it possible to feel another's pain, even when that other was yourself whom I had learned from habit to regard as the better part of my happiness which, like yours, has now been destroyed. It is terrible for me to think that your poor eyes, your poor cheeks, those things about you that I most love because they house and express your feelings as they wax and wane—but now no more,—will for so long, will for ever, be charged with your grief and disfigured by your tears. It makes me physically ill to think of you thus. I will write to you, or not write to you: I will speak to you of your sorrow, or not speak of it. I will do anything you want me to do. I don't ask you to have any affection for me. The spring of every sentiment in you other than sorrow must be broken. But I have never before known the full strength of my affection for you. I know it now. I am very unhappy.

MARCEL PROUST

1903 Monday

Mon petit Antoine:

about how you are or what you are doing I know absolutely nothing, and yet I know far too much, because, when I think of you—and that means at every moment of the day—I suffer somewhat as one suffers in moments of jealousy, though jealousy is not now in question. What I mean is that, though I have no certain knowledge of your condition, I can't help imagining what most would torture you, and having a vision of you, all the time, either in tears, so that the sight of you thus is misery for me, or not in tears at all, but frighteningly calm, which is just as bad, because tears would bring you relief. I imagine not only your poor face, your sleeplessness, or, if you should sleep, your horrible dreams, most horrible when they are of past happiness, but your every thought as well, and that is what chiefly hurts me. Yet, all the time I cannot help saying to myself—there was no limit to the Princess Bibesco's admiration of her son. There would be joy for Antoine in the thought that she is still with him though sick, and suffering at the sight of him making himself ill with excess of grief, forcing himself—not to feel his grief less bitterly, not to forget, which he will never do—but to find some way of making his grief compatible with the vigour of that intellectual life which alone—forgive me, Antoine my dear, for so soon urging you to have courage—will make it possible for him to become what his mother wanted him to become, to achieve those triumphs which she most wished for him. The thought of those triumphs cannot now, I know,

make you happy, because the hope of giving her pleasure was your greatest stimulus, and because you will not see the smile with which she would have received the tribute of your laurels. But you can still lay them on her grave. Antoine, my dear, when I, too, was bowed down by a load of wretchedness, I found much comfort—and find it still—in certain words of Ruskin's, and, when I am tempted to doubt their truth, I have only to think that a mind much more profound than mine, and much quicker to grasp such objections as might be brought against them, could resolve the difficulties, and hold the words for true and sure: "if parting with the companions that have given you all the best joy you had on earth, you desire ever to go where eyes shall no more be dim, nor hands fail, if feeling no more gladness, you would care for the promise to you of a time when you should see God's light again, and know the things I have longed to know, and walk in the peace of everlasting love . . ." etc. If you think that words like these might, at such a moment, bring comfort to your brother, then quote the passage to him. I wrote him a letter two days ago, but did not dare to quote them. I remember very clearly how helpful they were to me. I do not think that their power to comfort can ever be exhausted. The only persons I care about now are those who can speak to me of you or of your mother. You must never, Antoine, my dear, doubt the depth of my affection.

MARCEL PROUST

Are you likely to come back soon? I rather think that I may be sent away from Paris for the winter. But I don't want to go without seeing you.

1903 Thursday

Mon petit Antoine:

albeit that I have scarcely for a moment ceased to think of your grief and to see it in the harsh light of my imagination, the sight of your poor letter, with its writing so changed as to be scarcely recognizable, so tiny, with the letters all shrunken and diminished like eyes made small by much weeping, struck me down with a new violence of emotion. It was as though I were feeling the naked horror of your misery for the first time. I remember how, when mamma lost her parents (a grief so terrible that I am still amazed that she managed to live through it) though I was seeing her every day, and every hour of every day, when once from Fontainebleau I telephoned to her and heard in the instrument her bruised and broken voice—so different, and destined from then on to be always so different, from the one with which, till then, I had been familiar, so full of breaks and cracks—I realized for the first time, as I received those broken, bleeding scraps of talk from the receiver, and with an atrocious sense of agony, just what it was in her that had been destroyed. I could feel the appalling listlessness through which you forced yourself in order to write, the numbness in your heart whether you were speaking of your pain, or not speaking of it at all. That letter gave me pleasure, if I may use the word in such a connexion, but much unhappiness as well. Now about my joining you. I don't think you quite understand the nature of my proposal. True, I've *got to* get away from Paris, but to leave it at once is impossible for me. Why, is a profound secret, though I will

disclose it to you, if you would like me to, so that you may understand the nature of my difficulties. I won't urge you to write now that I know what a drain letters make upon you, but couldn't you let me know, through some third person, the precise nature of your plans, and whether my suggestion that I should spend March, April and May at Corcova, or, if you would prefer, June (provided there are no flowers) appeals to you. I have an idea that you will be returning to Paris at almost the very moment I shall be leaving it, and that makes me wretched, or, rather, it doesn't, because if that is to be so, I won't leave it on any account, but will arrange to spend a full month with my poor dear Antoine and mingle my tears with his, or, better still, produce no tears at all, but do my best to help him take up his life again, and be as kind and gentle as I know how to be. I was already beginning to blame myself for talking in my letters only of your grief, and feeling that I should like to make a start with other matters, at first with such as would be least likely to touch you on the raw, and, having some touch of intellectual interest or charm of habit, might the more easily, and without doing violence to your sorrow, find a "way into your heart". But your poor letter has sent me back again to my starting point at the beginning of the trail which I had blazed with my little odds and ends of news, hoping that they might—I won't say interest you, but at least divert your mind. I feel now that you are so exhausted, so detached, so absorbed, that I no longer dare to say any of the things I meant to say. I will, however, tell you (only you must swear not to let it go further) what it is that makes my immediate departure impossible (unless my presence is indispensable to you, in which case I would leave at

once). It is this. My brother is quite definitely going to get married, and I must meet the young woman whom I don't yet know, etc. *Only* no one knows about this, and mustn't know. If, in December, you decide to go somewhere without me, I do really think that Constantinople would suit you better than Egypt. . . . Everybody speaks of you in terms of real and heartfelt sympathy. Several ladies of your acquaintance, whom I have come to know quite recently, Madame Le Bargy, for instance, and Madame Tristan Bernard, moved me deeply by the way they spoke of you. But let me tell you what has touched me most. I went the other day to Gallé's to give some instructions about a vase. I was told that no work was being done for the time being, because Monsieur Gallé the elder had just died. I said to the assistant who told me that I was afraid it would be a cruel blow to young Monsieur Gallé. "Monsieur Gallé does not know"—"But how can that be?"—"He is in such a state of despair that his health is seriously threatened, and no one dares break the news to him for fear of fatal results."—"Was it his father's illness that brought on this state of despair?"—"No, he knew nothing about it. The fact is that last month Monsieur Gallé lost someone whom he admired more than any person in the whole world,—Princess Bibesco. Ever since then he has been so prostrated, that he has had to be confined to his room, and is forbidden to do work of any kind. We understand his feelings so well, sir . . . She was such a kind lady" . . . etc,—and he didn't know that I knew you. I've heard the same sort of thing on all sides, over and over again.

Forgive me, Antoine, my dear, for continually telling you things that might give you pain. I shall offend no more. There

shall be an end to letters, and, when we meet, I will talk only of indifferent matters. If you feel that you have not the strength of mind to read what I write, don't try; or to listen to me when we meet, then leave me. But I should be much to blame if I gave way to your grief, and I won't allow myself to do so. Your mother would pass severe judgment on a friend who should be so criminal as, I won't say for pleasure, but from weakness and a sense of personal desolation, to encourage her son in his misery. I feel quite sure that, when we meet, we shall be able to find in occupations of a serious and solemn nature some sort of a compromise between consolations which you would reject or distractions which would be powerless to distract you, and a grief to which you must not wholly surrender if only that you may retain the strength, the integrity, and the purity of your memories and of that vision of the past which tears, in the long run, will only sully and obscure. . . . This marriage business, coming just now, is really intolerable. But, quite apart from my knowing precisely what it will involve, my suggestion, as I have told you, holds good only for the end of February, and, thereafter, for March, April or as long as you like. It is on this point that I want to hear from you, unless, of course, I come at once should the affair I have told you of break down. As to spending the whole of the winter in Paris, that is something I can neither physically nor morally endure. If, however, you come back in January, or whenever you do come back, I shall delay my own departure in order to be with you for a while, provided, that is, you would really like to see me, and think that the pain I feel at your unhappiness would make it possible for you to put up with my attempts to revive in you a taste

for living by encouraging you in various activities, and by stimulating your interests in things of the mind. I have found Madame Le Bargy quite different from what I had supposed.[1] She is, as you told me, very intelligent. I met her at the dress-rehearsal of *Joujou*.[2] Sée took me to see her at two a.m. when he went to tell her that the play was a flop. One's only got to meet a person once to be sure of meeting her again and again in the course of the next few days. During the week following I sat next her twice at dinner, once at Madame de Pierrebourg's, once at Madame Straus's, and found her very good company. I dined this evening at the Noailles, where I met your Marghiloman cousin. I know how fond you are of her, but I never got within talking distance. Apart from that occasion, I have dined several times with your cousins who have been most kind.

But you are the only person I really want to see just now. Je t'embrasse comme je t'aime, de tout mon cœur.

MARCEL PROUST

[1] Madame Simone, the actress.
[2] A play by Henri Bernstein.

1903

Mon petit Antoine:

I read your brief letters every evening in bed, so as to go to sleep with sad but kindly thoughts of you. So far there have been two of them (mamma having given me hers), and, a

few moments ago, the third arrived, the nicest of the lot. But it put me into a condition of extreme agitation. I am going to try, in a not too muddled fashion, though I'm afraid you'll find it quite muddled enough, to explain why.

(1) For several reasons, too complicated to explain, it will be impossible, or almost impossible, for me to go to Egypt. Apart from the fact that it would involve a degree of fatigue which I could not face alone, though, if you were with me, I would etc—but otherwise not—I do think that from your point of view it would be far from desirable. You say "we", which must mean that your brother would be of the party. Now, your brother is kindness itself, but he does not know me, and all the good he might do you, and you him, would be ruined by the presence of a third person, a stranger who would get on his nerves all the time, and, in his present state of mind, be quite hateful to him. The real reason, however, is the one I gave you (you know it's a secret), namely, that my brother is getting married. I couldn't embark on a journey of that kind at the risk, should I fall ill, or even suffer from extreme exhaustion, of not being able to get back in time for the wedding.

(2) Nonetheless, I am extremely put out at the thought of not seeing you, all the more so since I must leave Paris in the spring, or, more accurately, at the end of the winter. Had this marriage not been delayed until round about the 1st March, I should have run the risk of not being here when you got back. But I have arranged things so as to be here, no matter what happens, because the longing to see you has recently become so tormenting, that I can't get any sleep. Then, there's another thing. I have got to deliver my *Ruskin*

to the *Mercure* by the 1st February for certain, start on another instalment between now and then, also for the *Mercure*, turn out at least one article, and perhaps two, each week, etc etc. To take my *Ruskin* with me, that is to say, thirty volumes, to say nothing of manuscripts—because I must include references to the *Bible of Amiens*, seems to me to present considerable difficulties. Now, here's a suggestion that may please you. Why shouldn't I go for twenty-four or forty-eight hours to some place not too far from Paris—because, as you know, I am always ill after a journey, and, if I am to have not more than one day in which to recuperate, must not risk being *too* ill—somewhere like Munich, for instance, if, as I believe it is no more than twelve hours from Paris, and, consequently, about half way to Corcova[1] (I will verify the distance in a Continental Bradshaw, but haven't got one by me, and want to answer your letter at once). Even if it involves a journey of fifteen hours, I'll do it, and, if I am too exhausted, will remain for three days. But I can't manage more than that. I could start about the 10th January, and even on the 7th or 8th (the 2nd and the 5th are family occasions, and I ought to be here for them, though if either of those dates would really be more convenient for you, I *could* manage it).

Yours

MARCEL

[1] My estate in Rumania.

1904 Sunday

Mon petit Antoine:

I am unhappy at having no news from you, but fully realize that you can't write, and, so, won't ask for any. But I want to make a suggestion. I gather that you may remain all winter in Rumania. I, as you know, shall not be allowed to stay on in Paris after January. Would you like me to come and settle down somewhere near you? I could bring my work, and, if I remained free from asthma, could spend February, March, and (if you're still there) April and May (provided there are no flowers), close at hand. I shouldn't get in your way because I should be some distance off, but near enough to come over for a talk whenever you wanted to see me, and to stay away when you didn't. I'm not making a definite promise because I *may* be ill, but I should dearly like to do as I suggest, and fully intend to, if such a plan fits in with your own programme. I don't know through whom I can get news of you. The Noailles said they were expecting the arrival of a housekeeper who would have some, but she never turned up. I'm afraid you may be having one of those nervous attacks which used to trouble you. What about your brother? I should like to know how he is, too. Does it make things better or worse for you two to be together? I'm entirely in the dark about all that. The truth is, I am entirely in the dark about everything except the ceaseless nature of your misery. Can you manage to do a bit of reading? I very much fear that the answer is "no". I continually ask myself questions which have you as their subject, and it is always the discouraging answers that seem to

me the most probable. Still, I should like to think that the life of the mind has not, with you, come to a stop, if only in obedience to your mother's wishes. That was the one thing by which she set store. But, for the mind to function, a certain minimum of physical health is necessary—believe me, I know what I am talking about. If you are to have health, you must see to it that grief does not become, or does not remain, too blind or too morbid. I won't say, try to lessen it, which, in your case, would not be possible, and even if it were, you would not want to—but do try to make of it a soft harmony of mind and heart, of tenderness and memory, that will keep you for ever in touch with the being from whom nothing has really been able to separate you. You must not let it assume the form of gnawing misery, of physical agony, because that, in the long run, will mean the ruination of your health and the obscuring of your memory to such a degree that you will no longer be able even to see those recollected images which it is your dearest wish constantly to evoke. This may, I know, be asking rather a lot of you. But perhaps if you try to bring your brother to that same state of mind—and your mother would have wished it—you can yourself attain to it, if only to be an example to him. Do try, when you can bring yourself to make the effort, to scribble me a few lines. They would be more precious in my eyes than any letter you have ever written. I have so longed for, so eagerly awaited them, have asked myself incessantly, so many questions to which they would provide the answers, have dreamed of you, and set myself guessing about you so often of an evening, so often at night. I hope, at least, that your physical strength has stood up to the ordeal, that you are courageous

in mind, and that it may be possible for you to find comfort, I dare not say in hope, but at least in memory. *Isn't there anything I could do for you in Paris?*

Your friend

MARCEL PROUST

1904 Friday evening

My dear Antoine:

I want to ask—knowing how super-sensitive you are in such matters, and how much you would like me to respect your feelings—whether you would rather I did, or did not, attend to-morrow's service?[1] I was foolish enough to go out yesterday evening, with the result that I am again in such a state that unless, as sometimes does happen, my asthma takes a sudden turn for the better, I am unlikely to be physically capable of going out tomorrow morning. My thoughts of you are no less sad than they were a year ago when I learned, in one awful moment, that all possibility of happiness for you, of tender love and counsel, of consolation and peace of mind, had been destroyed, and that a vast load of misery would weigh you down for ever. I never speak of all this to you out of respect for that deep and very special sensitiveness of yours, the unyielding nature of which you have made me feel. But I think about it all the time, and it needs no effort of memory, no artifice of "anniversaries" to bring to my heart again the

[1] A Memorial Service at the Rumanian Church.

wretchedness of a year ago, which, indeed, I have never ceased to feel, which, at the time, and for several weeks, left me prostrated with agony at the thought that your happiness—which, then, was a part of my own—had been destroyed. Each time I have seen you since, I have had the impression that you were suffering more and more intensely from your mother's absence, whether it was I guessed that therein lay the cause of the changes which have taken place in your character, or whether it was I felt, when other reasons for unhappiness supervened, that she alone—your friends being so helpless in the matter—could have softened their impact, and weakened their power to hurt you. That is why so constantly and so sadly I think of her, for she vanished before her mother's task, which was dearer to her than any other, had been accomplished. If personal immortality is a fact, I feel that she mourns her inability to come to you with consolation and arms opened in an embrace. I haven't had to wait until to-day to tell *myself* these things, but only to tell them to you, because you do not like my mentioning them, and this being the only occasion—because, owing to the state of my health, I had to excuse myself for not asking you whether I ought to go to the rue Daru—on which I felt that I had a right to speak out what my heart dictates. I hear that Emmanuel is not in Paris. He must be more unhappy to-day even than he would normally have been, since he is not with you. My loving, desolate thoughts move from one to the other of you, restlessly.

MARCEL PROUST

LETTERS TO ANTOINE BIBESCO

The following letters bear witness to Marcel's friendship from 1904 *until I went to America in* 1920.

I am in no position to judge whether they are likely to interest anyone besides myself. Should a day ever come when the world at large wishes to know something of Proust's countless acts of generosity and kindliness, someone may undertake to write a monograph on what his friendship meant. These letters may then be of service.

There was, among Marcel Proust's friends, something very much like a spirit of jealousy, envy and emulation, and my own relations with him had, as was natural, their ups and their downs. But I should like to quote here a letter he wrote to his friends, the Schiffs, who did not like me, in which he offers some interesting information about matters which concern both my brother Emmanuel and myself.

". . . As to Antoine Bibesco, I would have you know that when he and his brother read part of the manuscript of *Swann*, round about 1911, they were so enthusiastic (forgive me for talking in this way about myself), that they begged the *Nouvelle Revue Française* (Copeau was a friend of theirs) to print excerpts from it—which the editors refused to do—and, more particularly, to undertake the publication of the book, a suggestion which was even more firmly declined. This led to my trying publisher after publisher, always without avail."

"Bibesco, who adores my books . . . In whatever country he may happen to be, he takes them under his wing, and brings them to the notice of all who might like them."

1902

Dear Friend:

It will, unfortunately, be impossible for me to come to see you.

Forgive me if, two days ago, when your mouth was filled with a knot (forgive me) of mythological vipers, and you held a dagger in one hand, I did not give sufficient weight to the fact that, in the other, you were carrying a box of chocolates. It was almost absurdly sweet of you, and I did not thank you nearly enough. I am always deeply touched by your really incomprehensible kindnesses to me. I sometimes wish that I could use the word in the singular. I gather that yesterday love was lying in wait for you.

Good bye for now

Yours always

M.P.

1902 Friday

Dear friend:

thank you for your kind note which, though I scarcely dare hope that it reflects any desire felt by you, yet, if it merely seeks to satisfy one which you might suppose was felt by me, has, to that extent, been born of a friendly thought. This very evening, while I was trying to find some consolation for my disappointment in the pages of La Bruyère and Pascal, I found myself coming more than once on the word "friend"

MARCEL PROUST (*left*) AND HIS BROTHER

used more or less as meaning "one of two" and "advocate." La Bruyère says:

". . . Those in high places should know how to love. . . They should be at pains to take up with men of intelligence . . . and cannot sufficiently repay them with (I won't say) benefits, but with affection and many little acts of service in return for much that they do not even realise. How many rumours do not such advocates dispel? (can I really be sure that you are reading all this, Bibesco? If you aren't, what point is there in my wearing myself out in copying this remarkable passage?)—how many stories reduce to the dimensions of fiction or of fable . . . (it's too long: I omit the best of it) . . . how often spread abroad facts and details likely to be of help to their patrons, turning laughter and mockery against those who strive to circulate matters intended to evoke quite different responses . . ." etc, etc.

Pascal speaks, more briefly, though with greater force (I am amazed to find him so accurately informed of what goes on at Madame de Saint-Victor's):[1]

"A friend is so advantageous a possession, even for the greatest in the land—since there is always a hope that he may speak well of them, and champion them even in their absence (I like that "even")—that they should do everything in their power to come by one. But they must be careful to choose well, for, should they be at pains to enlist the friendship of fools, the results will be of no avail . . ." etc "even if they (the fools) speak well of them. Nor will what they speak be well should their characters be weak, for they then lack

[1] A lady who had a Salon, and was by no means popular with Marcel Proust.

authority (sublime!) and will slander by infection from the company they keep."

I should dearly love (this is no longer Pascal speaking, as, alas! I need hardly point out!) to have intelligence, that it might be used in your service, but you are not utilitarian, and I am not useful. . . . All the same, you have already found the way to my heart. Let me, then, say, as is so often said by those one visits for the first time,—"Now that you know the way, I hope you will come again." This analogy of the "host" is crude enough to produce on a Paris public an illusion of great psychological subtlety. You might do worse than slip it into the text of *Lutte*[1] should you find yourself short of a piece of smart dialogue—much as the skin from the posterior portion of an inferior animal has been grafted on to the divine face of Marsy,[2] or as the Venetians, when they built their basilica, inserted into their own work scraps and fragments which they had brought back from the countries they had loved.

Dear friend, enough of letters (*my* letters, I mean—for they really *are* letters, and not the notes you send me which are no more than messages which might just as well have been telephoned). I am making too much of friendship, which is a thing without reality. It was Renan's advice to eschew intimate friendships, and Emerson held the view that friendships should be progressively changed, though it is true that other men, no less great, have maintained the contrary. But I feel a sort of weariness of insincerities and friendships—the

[1] This allusion is to a play of mine which has never been published.

[2] An actress on whom the doctors performed an operation of the kind referred to by Proust.

two words mean more or less the same. Where friendship is concerned I am an old coquette, and remember what my professor of philosophy, Monsieur Darlu, used to say: ". . . Another new friend! what number did you give him when he entered the gateway of your heart?"

Good bye for now, dear friend. I am very much "yours"—to use the absurd Franco-English formula of which you are so fond.

M. PROUST

1902

Dear friend:

naughty though you have grown in the last few days, it would be nice of you, since I feel lonely and abandoned, to drop in before you go to dine with the soon-to-be-allegoric Bernstein. Even if you make it a little earlier, I shall almost certainly be awake. What I should value still more would be for you to tell me where, in the event of my feeling rather solitary round about midnight, you could be found—unless, of course, it is in the arms of "Salammbo", or unless the hour happens to be too late for you. But a few moments between midnight and one o'clock (though I don't want to *commit myself*, because I am going out) would be very pleasant. Still, if you want to go early to bed, don't bother, because that is an excellent thing to do—for those who can sleep.

Yours

MARCEL PROUST

1903

Dear Antoine:

it would really be doing me a kindness, if you could manage it, before 12.50 a.m., to come in for a few minutes. But if you are tired, don't bother. And don't, please, tell me—"I got home at one". I would so much rather think that you got home at midnight, and, feeling tired, did not come. You have only to give that double ring of yours. I looked for you (or, rather, got Bertrand to look for you,[1] being averse to put in a personal appearance) at Laurent's, as well as at the Petit Paillard and the Grand Paillard. Who was the lady? If you come to-night, there is something I want to ask you to do for me.

Affectueuses assurances de hausse ininterrompue,

M.P.

[1] Bertrand de Salignac-Fénelon.

A friend had arrived from Rumania, bringing me a present of a fur-lined coat. I already had several, and decided to pass on this latest acquisition to Marcel Proust. The winter was cold, and he possessed no such garment.

But Marcel declined the gift, as is made clear in the following letter.

1903

Mon petit Antoine:

I have just sent the coat back (for that's what I suppose it to be), but cannot do so without first telling you how deeply

touched and affected I was by your kindness, and explaining why it is I feel obliged to act in this manner.

No matter how vexed I may feel at your not listening to me, at your going against my express wish that you should not give me a coat which it was impossible for me to accept, no matter how vexed I may be at having to return it to you, I do not altogether regret your having sent it, because the memory of your action will take its place, in my heart, among those many actions which so forcibly express your quite extraordinary kindness where I am concerned, and differentiate your sweetness from everything else of the kind, confirming the exaggerated, the almost poetical idea which I have formed of your extreme goodness, and of the fantastic lengths to which your friendship can go. Please don't misinterpret my behaviour in returning it as the acid protest of affronted dignity, or as the purblind and insensitive reaction of a self-love which refuses to owe anything to anyone. What really, in general, makes a present of this sort unacceptable—as I am sure you will understand—is fortified and concentrated in this particular instance by unanswerable objections of which I will now remind you, if I have not already mentioned them. When my brother got married, he wanted to give me something, and something rather special, in view of the fact that I had acted as his Best Man. He suggested a fur-lined coat, which I refused. It was foolish of me to do so, since nothing could seem more natural, more simple, to him. If I now accepted one from you, it would really hurt him very much, as I am sure you will see. Only a few days ago I changed my mind, and told him that I would gladly accept his offer. If I now accepted this gift from you, I should

very soon give up using his. I should have cut the ground from under his feet in no very gracious manner. One last reason—though not a very important one—is this. You know that I am now living on an allowance which I find insufficient, and about which I have complained to my parents, who feel somewhat aggrieved. If I accepted this coat from you, it would look as though I were asking from the charity of others what the meanness of my family made it impossible for me to buy for myself, and protesting in a somewhat undignified and ungracious manner against a budget which my parents could, if they would, make rather more handsome.

I hope that, for these various reasons, my decision—which I hate to make—will seem reasonable to you. In any event, nothing will make me change it any more than it could make me change my affection for you.

MARCEL

1903

Dear Antoine:

Lauris[1] is dropping in to-day, Friday, at seven o'clock (don't in any case come before then, because I shall be sleeping late) to enquire whether I am well enough to have dinner with him. But it is certain (don't come before seven because I shall be asleep), since I've got a bit of a fever, or extremely probable, that I shall not be able to do so. It wouldn't be

[1] The Marquis de Lauris.

until a quarter past eight, but I fear I shall be much too unwell, in which case he will come back here after dinner to keep me company. I know he wants to see you, so would it be convenient for you to come then, though you are a wicked creature who, instead of playing the game of friendship in a frank and kindly manner, prefers to see all kinds of subtle reasons where none exist? I am feeling sad because *l'Indiscret* is not going well,[1] and mistrustful of others because I gather from you that it is good, though they say it isn't, and yet, in spite of everything, really rather happy because I feel quite sure that it is excellent, and that even its defects would be pleasing to me, and because if it is good, that is all that really matters. But why, Oh why, is vulgarity always successful, and genuine talent always neglected?

Yours

MARCEL

[1] A play by Edmond Sée then being performed at the Théatre Antoine.

1903

Dear Antoine:

are you lunching to-day at Weber's? This is why I ask. I have just got back from Chartres in a wretched condition, and felt so ill when I reached home, that I couldn't even go to bed. I am still fully dressed. If you happen to be lunching at Weber's I might perhaps, before going to bed, be mad enough to go

there with you, having for some time had the unaccountable desire to be precisely there with you, at midday, on a sunshiny morning. I would stay only a minute, and perhaps would not even get out of the carriage. Then I would come home and go to bed. Perhaps I would do no more than say howd'you do here. In any case, if you have already gone out when this note is delivered, do, please, if you don't mind, drop round with a word of greeting, any time before midday (if you should have gone out already, then I should not have gone with you, but stayed here), and, in any event, I shall look forward to seeing you this evening. I saw you neither the day before yesterday nor yesterday, and it seems a very long time.

Yours

MARCEL

1903

Dear Antoine:

on leaving the telephone this evening, I told Bertrand, Billy, and Reynaldo that they would have to go on without me, because I meant to drop in on you. I needn't explain how very much more I should have enjoyed that than going to Fursy or to Bernstein's play. I want to make that quite clear. But it never occurred to me that it was already nine o'clock, and that I hadn't even started dinner. By the time we left Weber's, it was a quarter past eleven, and I didn't dare to come round to see you, or even to run the risk of waking

you with a telephone call, since, most unfortunately, you are not as I am when I am ill, and one can't just knock you up at any hour of the night. You must really tell me whether you are engaged tomorrow (Thursday) because I am playing with the idea of going to Bruges on Friday, and, being a bit seedy, shall probably not leave my bed tomorrow at all. If, however, you were going to be in, I would slip an overcoat over my night things if I didn't feel up to dressing, and come round. Bertrand agrees with me that you seemed pretty well this morning. I can't write any more now than just to say that I really have an immense affection for you.

M.P.

I am returning, herewith, the *Maîtres d'Autrefois* with many thanks. I have bought the book for myself, so as not to keep and spoil your copy. I suppose you haven't got anything on Belgium and Holland which I could read before starting on my trip?

1903

Dear Antoine:

Yes, my brother's address is 136, Boulevard Saint-Germain. I have just told him of your very great kindness, and he will be no less touched by it than I am.

I dined with your Noailles cousin, and broke the loveliest of her little Tanagra figures. I have also dined at Vallières

with the Aimery de Rochefoucaulds and the Lucinges, but you will have read all about that party, of course, in the *Herald* and the *Gaulois*. Don't you think that young Lasteyrie—not the one who says such stupid things, but the other, whom they call Lolotte—is exactly like (in appearance I mean, naturally) Léon Blum?

I dined in the Bois (another Guiche party) with your friend Tristan Bernard. But it was quite a small affair, whereas, at Vallières, there were thirty of us. I had Bertrand's friends (not all of them) and Bertrand round to my place (but this was before the occasion I have just mentioned) the evening prior to his departure, and they all stayed on to supper. Albu,[1] you know is not the only one of my friends who is getting married. Guiche, too, is engaged. I have been seeing a good deal of him (though less than of the others). As a matter of fact, Albu comes to see me oftener, if that be possible, than before, and is really adorable. Still, I know, in spite of what he says, that things won't, and can't be the same after. . . . But I am far too fond of him to take a selfish view of his marriage. I know that you're always interested in medical matters, and also that you think me a bit mad, so let me tell you that I have consulted Dr Merklen, who is supposed to rank with Faisans as among the best of the fraternity. He says that my asthma has become a nervous habit, and that the only way to effect a cure would be for me to go into an "anti-asthmatic" clinic somewhere in Germany, where they would "get me out of" my asthma "habit" (but I shan't go),—much as morphine addicts are "demorphinised". I shall love to see

[1] The Duc d'Albufera.

your brother when he is passing through Paris, but must I really wait until then to get your news? Why shouldn't you tell it me in a letter?—you know I'm as secret as the tomb! Just try, and see if I'm not. I'd like your brother to tell me of anything that's interesting in Poitiers and Nevers.

I have given you only the frivolous side of what I have been doing since you left. But I know that you are convinced—aren't you? that "This is the apparent life" and that "The real life is underneath all this[1]". I must really stop now. What more is there to say to you? I told Barrès (though I didn't quote you in support of my view, having felt as I did from the very first) that I don't like the end of his article. I mentioned that the "Comtesse de Noailles" had never been *for* Dreyfus, that a man might still be wretched though innocent, but that it was wretched for an innocent man to be condemned. He merely laughed and said:—"Why this sudden outburst of pro-Dreyfus sentiment?" There was present a certain Monsieur Vaschide, who trotted out a number of absurd medical theories (not a word!), but otherwise a charming fellow, a Parsifal, who couldn't very well be engaged at the opera because he has too much of an accent, speaks too fast, and is so anxious to enlarge the field of his specialty, that he's for ever saying "*C'est nelveux*". What a frightful thing that was, my breaking the Tanagra figure.

Good bye for now, my dear Antoine. All affectionate messages to Emmanuel and yourself.

MARCEL PROUST

[1] Proust's English.

Marcel Proust had asked me to lend him the "Travellers' Club Year Book"—the Club premises are at 25, Champs-Elysées. He was thinking of putting up for membership, and wanted to see whom he could get to support his candidature.

1904

Dear Antoine:

many, many thanks for your letter, which makes me really long for London and *for you.* I am far from well, and I find work no less impossible than travelling. When next you write, do remember to tell me whether the "Travellers' Club"—of which I think I have heard you speak—is open until a late hour of the night, whether one can have one's meals there, whether it has bedrooms, and whether election is a pure formality, or whether it is a jealously guarded club.

(cf "Since I, too, am of their number")

De cœur à toi

MARCEL

Dear Antoine:

forgive, I beg, my *delay, brevity* and *changes of mind.* I got your letter and the Year Book, for which I send you heartfelt thanks. I am as fond of you as ever, but in this matter of the "Travellers" you are not of much use to me. I broached the idea in the first place only because I thought you more or less lived at the club, and had the members under your thumb

(what a horrible image!). It's quite another thing if I've got to be proposed, seconded, etc in due and proper form. I've given a good deal of thought to the business, and am inclined to feel that if there's going to be all this fuss, I'd rather try another club. The member whom you suggest would be far from pleasing to me (I would really rather not have him: I'll explain all about that later). At first glance it seems that the only men with whom I can claim friendship among the French members are Loche R— who is a Pole by birth, though now a French citizen who did his military service in this country, the excellent Fouquières, whose advice I will ask when he gets back from India, Eugène Fould, who has become more or less Austrian, and Louis-René de Grammont. We must talk the whole thing over again, but I am not really very keen. I have just been listening to *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Each time they give it, no matter how unwell I may be feeling, I rush to the instrument[1], and when they don't, I substitute for Périer and sing it to myself, with the result that I don't sleep a wink. For the moment, I am quite incapable of doing any work.

Yours

MARCEL PROUST

[1] The *Théâtrophone*, which used to broadcast operas before the days of the radio.

1904 Sunday

Mon petit Antoine:

I wrote to you yesterday—though I can't put my hand on the letter—to explain that I had been laid low by an attack of unrelieved asthma, as I was last year, that I couldn't, therefore, make any plans, but would write, or even telegraph, should there be an improvement. As it happens, I am feeling much better this evening. I am still in bed, but rather think that all will be well, and that the attack was the result of a chill or, more probably, of a somewhat excessive dose of trional. As soon as I'm back to normal life, I will let you know, placing myself at your disposition. But that, I'm afraid, will not be for some days yet. In the letter I wrote yesterday, so many of the words were scratched out, that I am afraid you would have found it rather odd. From that point of view, I am glad it has been mislaid, so that I can start again from the beginning. Many thanks for your own charming letters.

Yours gratefully

MARCEL PROUST

1904 Saturday

Mon petit Antoine:

"You are so intelligent"—to use a favourite expression of yours—that your letter turns out to be a point by point reply

to mine—which you had not received when you wrote. Sublime!

Forgive me for boring you with my various suggestions. Here is another. You tell me you are not going to Egypt. As it happens, things have turned out precisely as I thought they would. My brother's marriage has been put forward by a month, and will now take place on the 2nd February. If, therefore, it would *suit you* to stay on in Rumania, and only the threat of loneliness drives you away, I could (after resting for a few days in bed from the strain of the wedding) leave for Strehaia, which you say isn't practicable, though I know I should delight in its friendly discomforts, about the 10th February, arriving, after two breaks on the journey, about the 14th February, and then stay somewhere near you until April, being the very soul of discretion, never getting in your way, but always "at call" should you want to chat or to see a "representative example" of all your many acquaintances, someone whose presence would remind you of Blum, and with whom you could talk of Bernstein. I should find this modest but pleasant rôle infinitely agreeable, and could bring enough work with me to prevent my being an encumbrance, and to make more pleasant still such moments of expansion as I might find in your company. We would lead the exemplary existence of the hard-working family described by Xenophon, or the kind of life lived by Diderot and his friends at Grandval. I did not say anything of this in my last letter, though even then I knew that the marriage had been put forward, because I believed that you were going to Egypt. But now you have decided not to, perhaps this plan might provide a possible alternative?

You may, on the other hand, think it altogether better that I should go with you to Egypt. But that is a serious matter. I will, however, manage it if that is really what you would like. In that case, however, I should first have to rest for a while at Strehaia, and I fear that I might be an uncomfortable companion on so tiring a journey. In any case, I should need a full fortnight at Strehaia in order to build up my strength. If you think it better that I should spend the month of February with you, not at Strehaia (from the 15th on), but somewhere else, say Ragusa, if that is your choice, then, naturally, I agree at once, since Strehaia is for me merely the place where you happen to be, and I have no particular preference for it *as a place*. I sat down to write this immediately on receipt of your letter telling me that you are not going to Egypt, and without bothering about the details of my scheme. Some difficulties there may be, but I will straighten them out. I am not really going into details until I hear what you mean to do, since it may be that you would rather come back to Paris, in which case I will arrange not to be out of town, and so have a glimpse of you. The worst of this letter from your point of view is that it seems to demand an answer. But please don't feel that. If you would rather come back to Paris, don't reply at all. Write only if you consider my suggestion worth going into. In that case, just scribble on a piece of paper—"Quite feasible" or "Worth thinking about"—or, "Yes, Strehaia in March, or Ragusa." Don't put yourself to the trouble of a letter. I scarcely ever find time to write in my sick and exhausted condition. But if my letters offer you some distraction, and if my wretched odds and ends of gossip amuse you, I'll set about sending you some more bits of non-

sense. Please thank your brother from me for his charming letter, and believe me,

Yours affectionately

MARCEL PROUST

1904

Dear friend:

the thought of not seeing you this evening makes me very unhappy. I have hoped on until half an hour after midnight, but it is now half past one and I feel sure you won't come. To-morrow, or, rather, to-day, Thursday, I shall be going out and have arranged to meet Noneleff[1] at Larue's about eleven. Couldn't you join us? Are you going to the Noailles earlier in the evening? . . . but no, I am sure I couldn't manage to get along to them. Of course, if you don't like the idea of Larue's, but, all the same, want to see me, you could always come along here about half past nine, or even nine, but maybe you don't want to see me again? I've had a brilliant idea. I am going, as you know, to Illiers on Sunday. Illiers is only an hour's journey from Chartres. If you don't know Chartres, or would like to see it again, why shouldn't we both take the eight a.m. train? I could drop you off at Chartres, and you could spend the day there with Noneleff and his friends. Meanwhile, I would go on to Illiers, pick you up on my way

[1] Noneleff = Fénelon.

back, at Chartres, and then we could have a pleasant trip back to Paris together. I can't, alas, tempt you with the offer of a car—only with a modest first-class ticket. Send me a line if you find it impossible to come along here this evening—and be kind.

MARCEL

P.S. If you possess a copy of *Mâle* (History of Religious Art) perhaps you wouldn't mind lending it to me so that I can see what he says about Chartres: but if you can't lay your hand on it, don't bother, because I can get it from Billy,[1] or from somebody else.

[1] Robert de Billy, the Ambassador.

I left for Rumania, and Marcel continued to write to me.

1904

Dear Antoine:

I should like to tell you a little of what is going on, but I live almost entirely in my books. I dined yesterday evening at the Noailles, where I am a pretty frequent guest, and met, apart from the usual company, young Guiche, a fact which would not be worth mentioning had not Lucien[1] been placed next him. So physically transformed was he by this proximity

[1] Lucien Daudet.

that he talked without ceasing. I had never known him to be so voluble, and, in his eyes, there was that look of sheer joy which showed in Madame Bovary's face when she stood in front of the looking-glass and cried aloud: "I have a lover! I have a lover!" I gazed with melancholy at one so susceptible to the disease thus put side by side with the bacillus (snobbery). But see what happened (all this is in the strictest confidence), and I send you the anecdote only because I want to do what I can not to adopt a melancholy strain, *because, my poor dear, I won't ever again torment you with melancholy*). It is Lucien's firm belief that if the Grammonts never invite him, the reason is that he is his brother's[1] brother (Libre Parole, and the fact that the Duchess was a Rothschild). This supposed attitude of theirs was the cause to him of much dismay, but at least it explained the absence of any invitation. Towards the end of dinner, the innocent Guiche asked him: "Have you a brother?" Lucien, completely taken aback, would have dearly loved to take advantage of such happy ignorance, such blessed simplicity, to reply: "No, I haven't, and if anyone tells you that a Daudet has spoken ill of the Rothschilds or the Jews, that has nothing to do with me." But your implacable cousin had overheard the question, and so deliberately fixed her eyes on him that, after an agonising moment of hesitation, he answered—"Yes".

Always

MARCEL

[1] Léon Daudet.

1904 Thursday

This morning, I got your letter dated Sunday: what a long time it has taken!

Mon petit Antoine:

"Thanks for charming letters"—was very kind, very generous, and even prodigal in a telegram at so much per word, and could much more suitably be applied to yours, which give me enormous pleasure.

In any event, it is quite impossible for me to leave with Constantin, because I have caught a chill. I have spent to-day in bed, shall be up for certain to-morrow, but shall not be in a fit state to go away for some days (Constantin leaves to-morrow). There's another point, too, to be considered. I am very tired, and have a craving to get away somewhere, it doesn't matter where,—a hunger for "light, and blazing skies", after so many nights spent at my desk in a glow of electricity. On the other hand, I am terribly behindhand with work. I shan't have finished before the 1st March. I *could* go away before, but it would mean taking with me twenty-five "Ruskins", which would not be very convenient. Still, I would go with pleasure. Once you're back in Paris wouldn't you like a trip to Nice, or somewhere else? I hope that when you say "I shan't go to Constantinople unless you come too", you are speaking in a mood of whimsical kindliness and charming insistence. If you mean what you say, I shall die of vexation (exaggeration, but fundamentally true). Go to Constantinople. I should be only too glad to go

too, but, let me say again, that if I am to see you only for five days and no more, I should much prefer to wait here in Paris, see rather more of you, and then, having feasted my eyes, go off (to Constantinople or elsewhere, elsewhere for preference). All this, of course, unless (as I told you before) you decide to remain for some considerable time in Rumania, where I could see you just as early as in Paris, perhaps three weeks, after which we could go to Constantinople. Whatever you finally decide, I want you to do it as though I didn't exist (you would be much calmer and much happier if I didn't: why did you have to know me?), and then, when you got back, I could see you, if it wouldn't be a bore, not enormously often because I spend so much of my time working and sleeping, etc—I am far from well just now—but, in any case, for a few minutes each day when you happened to be free. But there mustn't be any more of the old tyrannical grasping.

All my love

MARCEL

I hear that your brother has been elected a Deputy. It is right and proper that his great heart and remarkable intelligence should find some way of acting on men in the mass. Is that what this election means, or does it just amount to nothing? In any case, I rejoice in his success. But I don't want to bore him with a letter. Tell him that I congratulate him from my heart. Be sure you do it, *moschant.*[1] You won't forget, now, will you?

[1] In our private language, "moschant" stood for "méchant".

My cousin, Brancovan, had, at the instigation of his former tutor, Marcel Mielvaque, who was to become one of its most assiduous contributors, founded a Review in which several excerpts from "Ruskin" were published.

1905

Dear Antoine and dear Emmanuel:

I am writing because I want you to be sure to read Boylesve's superb novel in the *Renaissance*, and, also, Barrès's excellent contribution. The whole number is admirable, and I hope, if you see Constantin, you will congratulate that latest in time of my familiars. On the other hand, who *can* have been responsible for the truly incredible leaflet which accompanied this particular issue? The opening paragraph runs as follows: "The *Renaissance latine* ventures to send you a copy of this Review." That I take to mean a copy of itself, since it is the *Renaissance latine* which is the subject of the communication. But how then, can it refer to itself as "this Review"? The leaflet continues as follows: "... a copy of this Review, in the hope that it will give you some idea of the way in which it is being conducted, and of the interest of *this publication*." In one of Offenbach's operas there is a dubious individual to whom somebody says—"The Comte de Saint-Dominguez?", and he replies—"Himself". I think he must have drawn up this piece of publicity. The rest is no less staggering. It says:—"the special sections which *figure* in this publication are *conducted* by Messieurs Léon Blum", etc, and each number concludes with a *copious bibliography* and an extensive review of the Reviews of all countries of Latin

MARCEL PROUST AS A YOUNG MAN

By J. E. Blanche

race and civilisation. "Review *of* Reviews *of* all countries *of* Latin etc" does not particularly shock me, since I am not Bertrand. But see what follows! A novel by Monsieur Marcel M. is announced: *When a Family Lands on a Desert Isle* (Jules Verne, etc). The accountant becomes a cook, the lawyer sets to work clearing the forest, the doctor turns into a sailor, all these things, owing to the necessities of the situation. Is it because of this Jack-of-all-trades philosophy that, Constantin having become the editor of a Review, Monsieur Marcel Mielvaque turns himself into an improvised novelist and beneficent "Friday"? These complaints of a peevish subscriber apart, the current number is really sublime (though Ruskin is attacked by both Humières and Madame Bulteau[1]). It is superior to all the *Revues de Paris* and *des Deux Mondes*, to the *Mercure* and all the rest of them. It is quite admirable, and one does not want to skip a line.

All this was but an excuse for me, dear friends, to repeat my solemn farewells, and to advise you to include in one of the forthcoming numbers Michelet's Preface to *l'Insecte*.

MARCEL PROUST

[1] Madame Bulteau, under the pen-name of *Fœmina*, contributed innumerable articles to the *Figaro* in the years before 1914.

1904

Mon petit Antoine:

your kindness to me has accomplished this miracle, that I, for whom people cease to exist as soon as they are no longer present in the flesh, feel precisely as though you were in the

rue de Courcelles at this moment. I dined this evening at your cousin Chimay's. The Princesse de Polignac, whom I had not seen for years, told me that she has just translated the American philosopher, Thoreau, whom you and I were to have undertaken in collaboration. What she said struck me to the heart, because it took my mind back to that delightful moment when we first met, and to our hopes in those days, which have never been wholly realized. *New York* has turned into a *Figaro* in which the shame-making publication may, at any moment, take place.[1] Constantin has asked me for some articles. I have done him the courtesy of substituting some excerpts from "Ruskin". I am very fond of you, Antoine, my dear, and rather think that I am also very fond of your brother.

Yours

MARCEL

"Mathieu",[2] as Lucien says, is really *very* intelligent (that is my opinion, not Lucien's).

[1] The reference is to one of Marcel Proust's "Salons" later collected into a volume.

[2] Comte Mathieu de Noailles.

1904

My dear Antoine:

it makes me miserable to think that I cannot come to say good-bye to you, but the pain in my back has assumed such

proportions that I cannot move. If you see your cousins it would be *nice of you* to tell them this and so explain my absence. Excuse me for being so scrupulous about "confidences", but I shouldn't like to annoy you. Have a good time in Egypt (I say this because I am sure you won't), stand in admiration before "*les grands Sphinx allongés au fond des solitudes qui semblent s'endormir dans un rêve sans fin*", "*Chéops qui dans sa gloire inaltérable dort*", and Egypt in general, "*au front bandé d'orgueil et de science.*" Egypt, "the parent of Astronomy, Geometry, and the mother of Christ."

My fondest wishes,

MARCEL

Nothing with Marcel was ever simple.
He composed a "portrait" of me, which was published in the Figaro *in* 1906.

"Monsieur Paul Deschanel may be seen questioning the Secretary of the Rumanian Legation, Prince Antoine Bibesco, on the Macedonian question. All those who address this young diplomat with a great future as "Prince", must feel rather like characters from Racine, so much does he resemble a mythological figure, turning men's thoughts to Achilles or to Theseus. Monsieur Mézières, who is now deep in converse with him, has the appearance of a High-Priest in the act of consulting Apollo. But if, as the purist Plutarch maintains, the oracles of Delphi were couched in very inferior language, the same cannot be said of the

Prince's answers. His words, like the bees of his native Hymettus, are swift-winged and distil delicious honey. All the same, they are not without a sting."

The following letter shows how exaggerated everything became in Marcel Proust's eyes.

1905

Mon petit Antoine:

I have had a talk with Calmette. What emerged from our conversation, much to my regret, and for reasons which I cannot fathom, is that he wants me to give him an article for publication *before* the one he already has. Consequently, I have given him, to be set up immediately, something I had ready on Madame Lemaire (he wants these things of mine to appear regularly once a fortnight, which means that if the Greffulhe sketch is really to come next, it will be a fortnight from now. But will it? that's what I can't be sure of). This being so, wouldn't you like me to transpose the miniature of my dear friend from the Greffulhe Salon to Lemaire's? That wouldn't prevent me from mentioning you again in the Greffulhe instalment. But it would be better to get you in now than to keep you waiting, and that, if you don't mind, is what I shall do. I told Ettemlac (Calmette) and Enadrac (Cardane) that I wanted to move someone from one Salon to another. I didn't, of course, say that it was your portrait

that I wanted to shift. They begged me, each separately, to do nothing of the sort, saying the thing was exquisite as it is, and I'll tell you why I think they said so. But I want to do it, if you don't mind, and I do beg and pray you *don't.* Are you agreeable to its being Deschanel who is seen talking to you about the Macedonian question? If not, whom would you prefer? I can't put Hervieu into a Salon which he never frequents.

Please send me your answer about all this before five. But don't come yourself, because I would rather not be woken, and leave your letter downstairs, because if you don't, someone will come up and wake me. I will ask for it when I wake. On the other hand, do try to spare me a moment (if you and Emmanuel would like to dine, send mamma a note, warning her: she is always asking when you are coming to dinner). If you don't come to-morrow, please fix a day, because I have a lot to tell you about my conversation with Calmette, which really seems to me rather mysterious. What are you doing this evening? I met Flers and Caillavet, who thought, etc etc, and invited me to the first or second performance of *Vergy*[1] etc. I found all sorts of wonderful excuses, but am beginning to wonder whether I hadn't better go this evening (Thursday). If I do, I may telephone to them: but, on the whole I think I won't.

Always

MARCEL

[1] *Sire de Vergy*, a play by Flers and Caillavet.

Dear Antoine:

it would be really charming of you to look in on your way home from Madame de Pierrebourg's (what time would that be?). If you don't find me you will find a note, and, anyhow, it is on your road. I would be more precise if I could. I shall be here if I don't have to meet Charles Ephrussi at an hour which I shan't know for certain until after you will have gone out to dinner. Why are you so good to me? You are already Ibsen and Carlyle: are you claiming to be on the way to becoming Jesus as well?

It is now three o'clock in the afternoon. I haven't had a wink of sleep yet, being both very ill and very unhappy. If you turned up before half-past six it would be sheer murder, but after half-past six enormously kind. Best of all, try to put in an appearance at the place I shall mention in my note. How about Larue's at eleven?

Yours

M.P.

1905

My Dear Antoine:

I think of you often, and affectionately. If I have not sent you my translation of "Ruskin", the reason is that Emmanuel advised me to wait until he could give me an address which would be sure to find you, and this he has not yet done. You have seen, I gather, "*des sables et des astres*". Perhaps, "*astro-*

logue noyé dans les yeux d'une femme, la Circé tyrannique aux dangereux parfums, pour n'être pas changé en bête" you have made yourself drunk on "*cieux embrasés.*" "*La glace qui le mord, le soleil qui le cuivre, effaça-t-elle enfin la trace des baisers*"? I rather hope not, but what I really fear is that over there "*tu ne sois souvent ennuyé comme ici.*"

All my love, dear friend.

MARCEL PROUST

I have no idea where this note will find you: it is written from Versailles where, for the last four months, I have been lying sick; but don't visit me there because I am not on view until eight in the evening, and later than that is difficult.

I had written to Marcel, congratulating him on one of his articles.

1905

Dear Antoine:

thank you for the charming thought.

I miss you very much. Tell Emmanuel that I am conscientiously trying to be all he so kindly suggested, and a thousand other things as well, that I am very ill, and very, very grateful to him.

My love to you both

MARCEL

On one occasion I had asked Marcel Proust for a list of proper names which could be used [fictionally], but which happened to be those of living persons. The following is his reply. I felt very guilty about the time I had caused him to waste over it. The trouble he took is a good example of his scrupulosity and friendship.

My Dear Antoine:

forgive my not having answered your letter sooner: I mislaid it before reading it, and have only just laid hands on it again.

What you ask raises a number of difficulties, because nowadays a lot of people bear the names of families now extinct but which figure in the pages of Saint-Simon, without, however, being entitled to do so by the fact of relationship. Some admit this frankly. For instance, the Comte de la Feuillade, and Madame de Lauzun—who does not, I think, claim to be actually descended from Lauzun. But that is not so in every case, and we have friends. . . . In spite, therefore, of the objection I have raised, here are a number of names which I believe to be extinct. You will be able to verify what I say from the Paris Directory, the Almanac de Gotha, and your own experience of the Great World. I exclude all those used by Balzac (*and which were not extinct in his day*): Tessé, Ternas, Listenois, Limenil, Tressan, Tresmes, Morville, Moussy, Murée, Meuse, du Roure, Entragues, Saint-Adon, Adoncourt, Agenois, Saint-Aignan, Jarze, Kerkado, Lambese, Prie, Priego, Selville, Shomberg, Louville, Saint-Louis, Albano, Albemarle, Albert, Alegre, Alincours, Reze, Phelypeaux, Plenoeuf, Polastron, Cartelin, Camillac, Lusace, Lumain, Lusignan, Lussan, DuLac, Luge, Mahoui, Maillebois, Artin, Arneguec, Arizza, Argouges, Argenton, Avaux,

Aubaton, Ambercourt, Auleterre, Aubigné, Aumont, Aydie, Banille, Tallart, Mortende, Mortrey, Montgon, Montgaillard, Mongivrault, Montmorel, Montreval, Montsoreau, Morstein, Mortagne, Fervaques, La Feuillade, Ferriol, La Feuillée, Estoublon, Esteva, Estrades, Estaing, Evreux, Feuquières, Fiennes, Flamaras, La Carte, Bercy, La Buchère, Beringhen, Bernaville, Beuvron, La Billandrie, Bissy, Blamo, Balinville, Blansac, Blancmesnil, Blécourt, Boisguilbert, Bois-Dauphin, Boysseuil, Bonac, Bosson, Bincheret, Castelmoron, Cassou, Cassart, Harlay, Halluyn, Hallegres, Rubatel, Canaple, Balize, Bechaneuil, Belestat, Boufflers, Baldue, Bouligneux, Bourlemont, La Bourlie, Borteville, Bouyols, Brajeloque, Brancas (but now I come to think of it, Brancas is extinct only in the male line, and I rather think there is a female Brancas P, and another, unmarried, who calls herself Comtesse de Brancas), Bregendire, Breante, Bretagne, Brillac, Brionne, Brienne, Bussy, Soisson, Sourches, Sousternou, Tencin, Thianges, Tournay, Tresnel, Tresmes (I may have already included that one), Turgol, Trudaine, Tursin, Thury, Lobineau, Lopineau, Longueville, Longepierre, Langalluire, Lageron, Langlée, Lamoreleau (perhaps not extinct), Lassy, Lavaudin, Sainte-Hermine, La Hire, Floranges, Florenseau, Feversham, Saint-Evremont, Saint-Megrin, Melun, Melac, Manguy, Meuille, Menin, Maurepas, Mazarin, Meau, Medavid, Majorda, Nevet, Nevers, Nesemond, Nanjis, Saint-Nectaire (perhaps not extinct), Nancre, Negrion, Nelause, Mansart, Mancel, La Garnache, Saint-Germain-Beaupré, Saint-Géran, Croissy, Creuilly, Dalmont, Dugeau, Chelurgel, Chamboras, Oppède, Saintblon, Patkul (might come in useful for a comedy which you thought

insufficiently amusing by itself!), Permangle, Gale, Frontenac, 'Ganaches, Dogois, Douze, Dromesnil, Effiat, Espernon, Espinay (perhaps still used by the Lignes), Estaives.

I hope this list will be useful.

Yours

MARCEL

At the end of 1904 *I was transferred from the Rumanian Legation in Paris, to the one in London. Marcel wanted to give me letters of introduction to some of his English friends.*

1905

Dear Lord Fitz Maurice:

this is to ask you to let my friend Prince Antoine Bibesco call on you. He will be in London for the next three months as Secretary to the Rumanian Embassy, the King of Rumania being anxious to make the aspirations of his people better known in London. The purpose of this letter is as I have described it, but the real reason of my writing is to get, through Prince Antoine Bibesco, news of you, and also because I should like to take this opportunity of renewing the expression of my sincere friendship. But what gives me particular pleasure is the thought that I can make you acquainted with the most intelligent, charming and warm-hearted man I have ever known, and to set the scene for

conversations which your mutual friend will have to enjoy only in imagination, and with much envy, chained as he is, far from London, on his lonely, silent rock, where he remains as unhappily as ever did Andromeda. Thanks to your kind offices, Bibesco will be in a position to make the acquaintance of all that is admirable in your country in the way of intelligence and beauty, from George Meredith to Mrs Sydney Webb.

As soon as he knows your address, he will let me have it, so that I may be able to send you my translation of the *Bible of Amiens*. I do not doubt that you will find a perverse pleasure in seeing, thus disfigured by a clumsy and, occasionally grotesque disguise, a work whose beauties in the original you so cordially dislike.

Believe me, my dear Lord Fitz Maurice,

Yours sincerely

MARCEL PROUST

45, rue de Courcelles, Paris

1905

Mon petit Antoine:

you would be much better employed in writing plays than in trying to change the map of Europe to the advantage of your country.

The English Empire, and the frontiers of Norway, are a great deal less important than the plays of Ibsen and of

Shakespeare. But one can never put oneself in another man's shoes, and it is possible that you may be right. In any case, rest assured that you can rely on me absolutely. I have just written to Calmette, and, though Rumania is not, at the moment, in the news, your article will appear.[1]

But will anyone in your country ever realize what you are doing for her?

Affectionately

MARCEL PROUST

[1] An article in which I set myself to defend the cause of Rumania against her enemies.

This letter was addressed probably to Monsieur de Fleuriau: but I never delivered it.

Dear Friend:

I was deeply touched by your post-card, and by your good offices on my behalf with Monsieur de la Sizeranne. I shall write to you again soon about the marvellous hagiographies which I was so delighted to receive, and also to ask your advice. But at the moment I have another favour to beg of you. One of the most remarkably intelligent persons I have ever had the good fortune to meet, Prince Antoine Bibesco, is about to spend three months in London as Secretary to the Rumanian Embassy. If you can bring yourself to show him

some part of the kindness you have shown me, you will find him far more worthy of your trouble. Thanks to you it will be possible for him to derive from his stay in London greater intellectual profit than he would otherwise do, and you, I think, will find much pleasure in getting to know so remarkably gifted a man. I hope that, in any case, you will forgive my indiscretion in writing, and will allow me to take this opportunity of renewing my expressions of gratitude and respect.

MARCEL PROUST

Emmanuel and I wanted Marcel to join us on a motoring trip through England.
Here is his reply to our invitation.

1905

It is charming of you, mon cher Antoine, to think of including me in so attractive an excursion. But since I got back to Paris, I have been pursued by ill-health, and dare not go away for so long. But if, some future year, you return to England, I shall ask you to let me lease a house near you so that we can see one another easily. As a matter of fact, even this year, I might fairly soon be able to go to some place like Brighton. Now that I have become a "passionate devotee" of motoring, I could easily slip across for a chat with you and Emmanuel. I should like to tell him what I most admired in Bayeux, that I went to great pains to get a letter of intro-

duction to Maintenon,[1] but wasn't able to use it, and to express once more, in the spirit of friendship, how grateful I am for your joint kindness to me.

MARCEL PROUST

[1] A country house belonging to the Duc de Noailles.

1905

My Dear Antoine:

here is a letter for the President of the "Royal Academy". Have you met Lady Grey? She knows a great number of people, and so might be a pleasant acquaintance for you. I have no idea whether she or Madame Talbot remembers me: but I could easily ask Monsieur Hébrard, who is very intimate with her, or Reynaldo, to put you in touch. You have only to ask me. Would it interest you to meet some of the editors or critics of English periodicals? I rather think that Billy knows several of them, and it would merely mean dropping him a line. Would you like letters of introduction from d'Humières to some of the diplomatic corps? I asked my brother whether he knew any interesting scientists, but the only ones he mentioned seemed to me only so-so, and not really the kind of people you would like to know.

Always

MARCEL PROUST

1905

My Dear Antoine:

thank you for your letter which I enjoyed enormously. It made me feel all the more remorseful for something rather ill-bred that I have done. The son of some very nice and charming people whom I met at Cabourg, has gone to London to learn the language and the English methods of business. I gave him a letter of introduction to you. I ought to have asked you first whether you minded. But at that time I was completely prostrated (I am now laid low on a sick-bed) and merely sent him the letter without first writing to you (though I meant to do so). I gather from your note that he has not so far made use of it. That comes as something of a relief, for I feared you might think I had been indiscreet. He is very young and comes of an extremely middle-class family, so don't talk to him about *saturnians* etc. I feel that I am to some extent responsible to his parents. Forgive me for not writing at greater length. My crises don't leave me much leisure just now. I am really very ill, old man, and your absence, as well as the way I live now in a constant state of oscillation between intelligent company and silence, makes you all the dearer to me.

Are you doing any work?

Yours

MARCEL PROUST

No, it would be very difficult for you to see me now, quite apart from the fact that I am probably going South.

AN EXPERIMENT THAT FAILED

When I was twenty, and a confirmed reader of adventure stories, I fondly believed that friendship could be something completely absorbing and secret.

Marcel Proust's feeling for me seemed to be so fixed and certain, that I proposed a pact between us, in pursuance of which, unknown to anybody else, I should keep him posted in what other people were saying about him, in return for a similar freedom of communication on his part.

One thing, in particular, I remember recounting, that Porto-Riche had advised me not to see much of him, on the ground that it would do my reputation no good.

I told him, too, that Léon Daudet, whom I had met at my cousin's, Anna de Noailles, had given it as his professional opinion, that the state of Marcel Proust's health was due to morphine (which was not true).

Marcel, on his side, quite failed to observe the rules of the game, and never committed the slightest indiscretion, except on a single occasion—mentioned in one of the letters that follow.

The pact of which I had dreamed was broken. But, in spite of that, Marcel Proust remained for me a friend beyond compare.

1904

Dear Antoine:

I want only one thing of life, which is to do what you most certainly could not do yourself. I only hope that this phase will not come to an end too soon, and meanwhile, I am ever yours

MARCEL

But remember, this phase demands *loyalty, loyalty,* and again, *loyalty,* since it is based not on sentimentalism but devotion.

1904

Dear Antoine:

my habit of telling you everything must remain your private privilege, and must not be extended to anybody else. Lucien Daudet, Reynaldo, Yeatman, etc do not have an inkling of it. It must be kept from Lauris, Billy, and Constantin.[1]

I am going through a good deal of unhappiness just now, my dear, and life is not very gay. Forgive me.

Yours

MARCEL PROUST

[1] My cousin Brancovan.

Dear Antoine:

this is to tell you that I am for ever hearing fresh stories about the women you have wanted to rape.

Your violence is really fantastic. But what is much more important, don't come to see me any of these afternoons, because I couldn't admit you, being very tired. Never before nine or ten in the evening. Drop me a line to say when you are leaving.

Good bye for now

MARCEL

1904

Dear Antoine:

(this has nothing to do with the note I ought to be writing you, or, rather, is its entire negation.) Something that Reynaldo said came back to me this evening, and set me thinking, with diametrically opposed results. What, in fact, I told myself was this: that if you had been rather silly, I had been more so: that the moment was really extremely ill-chosen, and that I ought to have known what I wanted, whether to go on, or to return to a condition of *exclusive friendship for you*. My answer to myself was "yes". If, therefore, I have recently spoken of you in less lyrical terms (don't think that's my rather oblique way of admitting it), or have said nasty things about you, nothing could be less true. The truth is that I have been judging you coolly, instead of putting you on a pedestal, etc, etc. I would develop this thought of mine, but am so feverish that I can't write. If you can look in on your way back from the Bois, you'll be sure to find me because I'm on a bed of sickness. As soon as I get rid of my fever, I shall be delighted to dine at Armenonville. It is something I have wanted to do for years.

Yours

MARCEL

1904

Dear Antoine:

you were *very kind* this evening: but what it comes to, when all's said, is that you have bought my soul, and that I wish I could repay all the kindness and take it back as it would have been had I never sold it, with its secrets unbetrayed, its tombs and altars unravished. There are moments when I see rise before me, eloquent of reproach, the dead face of him who "might have been but is not", in other words, of the better man I should have been if, in my desire at all costs to give you the necessary information, I had not sold what no one should be able to buy and which, actually, only the Devil does buy. But, alas! "It may not be mended and patched and pardoned and worked up again as good as new"[1]. As to my translation of *Ruskin*, I wish I could have done the revising before. It consists in this: that wherever I am in doubt, I have put a ? in the margin. We will go through the book together, and each time I come on a ? about which I have not asked d'Humières, I will ask you (or Nordlinger[2]).

Yours

M.P.

[1] Proust's English.

[2] Proust's secretary, who helped him with the translation of *Ruskin*.

1904

You have a number of faults. If you could correct them (not in your relations with me, but with your friends to be)

I am sure it would be of enormous value to you, first, because you would become better, more perfect, more subtle, and also from the purely utilitarian point of view. Don't change with me: one can't change a play one has written, but only write a better one, learning from the faults of its predecessor. Make new friends, and don't relapse into the same errors (I shall benefit at second hand from your development).

Yours

MARCEL

1904

Mon petit Antoine:

(I am not, you see, writing in anger—besides, one *ought never to get angry except about unimportant matters*—and, anyhow, these incidents recur to my mind far too often for me to let myself get worked up to an excessive pitch of nervous and emotional exhaustion over them.) There are just one or two *ultima verba* that I should like to say, after which these endless bickerings must come to an end between us once and for all. I have to-day suffered the punishment of Nemesis for trying to overstep the possibilities allowed to me by destiny.

(1) In believing that I could contract a friendship which might ignore the limits and restrictions ordinarily placed on friendship.

(2) In violating for the sake of my friend all the most sacred conventions about keeping certain matters secret from others, etc etc.

The fact is, I have sacrificed to you what, till now, has

been the one permanent trait of my character, an inability to retail mischievous tittle-tattle, and all because you said, over and over again, that that was the one proof of friendship which I had not, so far, given you.

"*Hélas! devais-je en croire une amante insensée?*"

To continue in the mood of "Andromaque"—no sooner do I do what you ask, though oppressed by a feeling of shame at breaking my solemn word, betraying a friend, and immolating my conscience on *your* altar—than you immediately punish me by sending me Machiavellian answers, and thus creating the most truly tragic situation possible to imagine, one so tragic, that Racine could express it only in a single sublime line which I would apply to my own case were I not determined to wash my hands of the whole business:

"*Grâce aux dieux mon malheur passe mon espérance!*"

Now for practical considerations. We will, if you don't mind, put an end to this cruel and impossible pact which has already brought so much trouble on my head. I have chosen a strange moment at which to denounce it, seeing that I have obliged you with a thousand revelations, whereas you have not sent me the tiniest word. It is not the most suitable moment for sharing out the proceeds, since I have given everything, and you nothing. I am selling out my shares at a bad time. Never mind! Let us put *finis* to the whole affair, but to our friendship, never. You won't find a scintilla of difference in my affection for you, but there must be a truce to confidences and plots and deadly secrets.

All my feelings of warmest friendship to you.

MARCEL

I could say a lot in justification of this letter: but don't think it would do much good, do you?

1904

My Dear Antoine:

what amazes me is, after not seeing you, to feel suddenly an *enormous pleasure* when, as this evening, I meet you again. The truth is that your person, your physical self, holds a sort of unconscious memory of all the marvellous qualities you used to have, which, once materialized, though forbidden by the demon of your self-destroying character to be anything but mere looks, mere inflexions of the voice, mere gestures, do, however, retain for one who has known them in the past, the charm of a peculiarly moving visual residue, such as certain objects leave of themselves, make of themselves, in the form of indelible traces of meaning and beauty. Then, too, since fundamentally my nature is sympathetic, I the more readily recreate in myself those states of mind which link me with others, rather than those which separate me from them. The memory of the rare kindnesses that you have shown me (I don't mean by "rare" that they have not been numerous, but, on the contrary, that they were of an exquisite and *rare* quality) comes often back to me, making me feel a strong desire to do something for you should an occasion present itself, which, alas, considering my situation in the world, seems little probable, though that is but one reason the more

MARCEL PROUST IN 1890
DURING HIS MILITARY SERVICE

for believing that it may be possible. So let me say this: if ever, in any circumstances, I can be even temporarily useful to you, I shall rejoice to think you may remember that in this unusual but clearly defined sense.

I remain

your devoted and grateful

MARCEL PROUST

I should be very much pleased if Monsieur Vuillard could be prevailed upon to sell me his sketch of the dinner at Armenonville. It is a curious coincidence that his wonderful talent, which so enriches my memory, should be associated with one of the really charming and perfect moments of my existence. You would be doing me a great service by asking him.

1904

My Dear Antoine:

I write now from an excess of scruple—and from a constant fear of being false as having merely replaced by a different sentiment, one, the expression of which can persist in the mind of another as the statement of a constant truth—(what a style!)—something which it pains me much to write, and which may not be true, if, by true you understand something entirely realized, whereas what I am concerned with is merely a truth in the process of becoming, etc. What I want to tell

you is that your (in other respects very natural) new attitude to me—secretiveness, or, rather, an absence of confidence, in one word, of *union*—has come up against, in me, a self which I never was before I met you, a self which you have made what it is and which has acquired the habit of no longer living for itself alone, but of extending to the very limits of another's life its own horizon of existence, and, consequently, of perpetually spreading into this undiscernible prolongation of itself all that its life contains of brilliant and muddy, mingled with the sights it sees and reflects, the secrets of which it has been made the depository. Now that I have lost my second self—(in other words, you) as a result of your new attitude, I have not been able to change the different form which you have given to the first. Now, as a river newly contained by a wall where once it flowed naturally—a high and impenetrable wall—spreads on the further side, obedient to the law of its level, enriching new lands or being lost in them—so I have had to pour into the ears of another confidant what you refuse to take from me, and to receive from him those confidences which have become necessary to me since you bred in me the habit of them. I am a coward, I know, and the knowledge makes me blush with shame.

Calmette has sent word that the proofs will reach me to-day.

I think that those with which I have had to put up while making you wait for Touarhel will soon be finished, and that the article will appear almost at once. Young women have very different ways of looking after themselves in pregnancy. *Madame Yeatman* would not venture to go to Senlis, but *Madame Louis de Montebello* went to London to be present

at a wedding (Raoul Duval's). Madame Yeatman's was the right choice. I only hope that the future nephew or niece of Bertrand, quite apart from the industrious activity which he or she will have inherited from the parents, will not suffer later from having been so shaken about.

Yours

MARCEL

This is Marcel's reply to a request of mine that he would send me another copy of one of his articles which I had mislaid.

1905

Dear Antoine:

I am sending you my article on the motor-car, since you like it. Keep it. If I get no more publicity than this, I am content. I really can't say which is my favourite. I have an idea that you may be right. Still, in the other two there are occasional phrases which, to my mind, convey thoughts of greater subtlety and higher importance. I have, however, had to confine myself to a very summary treatment of these truths, feeling sure that the article is sure to come under the eyes of Palikao or of Lasteyrie, who, fortunately will keep themselves in hand and wait for an opportunity of dealing with . . . whom? Let us, too, wait before we name the writer on whose head we should like to heap the most telling abuse, the one "with whom Palikao feathers his nest, and whom Napoléon Gourgaud regards as the pick of the bunch"

I don't want to force you to write, or to drive you into that most horrible of all things (a correspondence), but I should like to know whether you have received the two articles. For it is annoying to find, on one of the very rare occasions when I can check up on the letters posted by my servant and discover whether they have really reached their destinations, that they haven't. Isn't there a saying—"*Ab uno disce omnes*"?

I speak of frivolities because we share the ability to *relax*, an essential and healthy virtue, and one recommended by Joubert.

Always

MARCEL

I had written to Marcel for news of his Ruskin. *This is what he replied.*

1906

Antoine:

what I am doing now isn't work in the true sense of the word, but only compilation, translation, etc.

There are passages which I find very difficult to understand. But Nordlinger has helped me, and so have you, and I am infinitely grateful.

The whole undertaking has had the effect of making me hungry for achievement, without, however, providing a satisfactory meal. Now that, for the first time after a period of torpor, I have turned my eyes inward in an attempt to find

out what my mind is up to, I feel to the full the emptiness of my existence, a hundred characters for a novel, a thousand ideas, all clamouring to be clothed in flesh like those Shades who, in the Odyssey, beg Ulysses for a little blood to drink, that by virtue of it they may be enabled to return to the world of men, and whom the hero drives off with his sword. I have wakened the slumbering bee, and am more conscious of its cruel sting than of its powerless wings.

In the past I made my intelligence the servant to my ease. I have loosened its chains thinking only to free a slave: but, instead of that, I have given myself a master whom I am not physically capable of contenting, and who, if I did not resist him, would kill me.

Yours

MARCEL

Actually, the worst of my crisis is over now, and I could perfectly well leave Versailles. But it has left me sick and sorry, and the weather is horribly unpleasant. I shall wait and see: but I have my doubts.

1905

Dear Friend:

(1) Here are the numbers of the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* for which you asked: I couldn't get hold of any other copies, and so, am lending you mine (to say that is superfluous, since what is mine is yours—a commonplace sentiment which

sounds a bit rash, though, as I'll explain when we meet, it is really rather charming).

(2) In spite of getting a letter this morning which did a good deal to smoothe out my worries, it is only to-day that I am really beginning to be aware of their *physical* effects, with the result that I have had so acute a crisis that I don't at all know whether I shall be in any condition to go to Versailles. If the worst is over by six, I shall: otherwise, I very much fear that it will be beyond me. Fear, because I am so delighted to think that you are really coming back. But for Billy's being here, I should have taken a train for Versailles round about nine, and been on the platform to meet the two of you[1] at eleven. But, in spite of the fact that I have now for many years been paradoxically, patiently, and violently acclimatizing him to my whims, Billy would never be able to understand why I should be so eager to make the trip, and, if I can't go and dine at Versailles, I'd rather not go at all. I still have a very lively hope that I may be able to manage it after all, and get to Versailles, where Peter would do me a world of good. We'll see. If I can't, and if you don't see me, remind Bertrand that he promised to look in at both Larue's and Weber's when he got back to Paris. I shall be with Billy at one or the other of them. I shall be there from the time your train gets in round about eleven-ten (I'll look up the time-table to make sure) or eleven-forty, until, roughly, half-past one. I've got things to tell you, if not this evening, then whenever we next have a chance of a long talk, which you won't find at all spiteful.

[1] Bertrand de Fénelon and me.

I should like to have the most *precise details* of what Madame de Noailles likes to eat, drink, and have; also, *whether there are any people* she would particularly like to meet, or not to meet. In short, I want to be told what I ought to do. I shan't want this information before Tuesday: —rice? —but how done? —boiled? —in water or in milk? etc: chicken?— and, if so, roast or how? in aspic? etc. You and I must have a talk about all that.

Till this evening, dear wretch

M.P.

If the weather has made you change your Versailles plan, and if you all decide to dine in Paris at a restaurant, send me a note, so's we can meet after dinner.

Mademoiselle de Mornant, a "flame" of Saint-Loup (one of the heroes of "Time Regained") played a part in Marcel Proust's life.

1906

Dear Antoine:

could you render me *discreetly*, by which I mean without mentioning it to anybody, the *following service*: to telephone for me to Hermant to ask him whether, in his capacity as the dramatic critic of *Gil Blas* he is going, this evening, to the first night of *Otero*, and whether he will be writing a notice of it. If the answer is "yes", then will you say that he would be doing me a great kindness if he could put in something

to the effect that Mademoiselle de Mornant, who has a part in one of the items on the programme, is very lovely, or charming, or whatever. It might run something like this: "One of my friends has asked me to say, and I do so with much pleasure, that Mademoiselle de Mornant . . ." If, however, *Gil Blas* does not concern itself with the doings of the *Théatre des Mathurins*, ask him whether he could do a paragraph on Mademoiselle de Mornant for the *Courrier des Théatres*, but to wait until I send him "copy". I don't think that I shall be at your dinner, even supposing (which I think improbable) that Constantin should invite me. Why half-past-seven?—which makes it all the more difficult?

Good bye for the present, dear Antoine

MARCEL PROUST

To-morrow, Friday (To-day) I think I shall sleep late. Please do the Hermant business *in time*. Does Sée ever engage in dramatic criticism?

1906

Many thanks, mon petit Antoine: I am not sending my letter direct to Sée, because I would very much rather have you re-write it. Tell him that the lady in question calls herself Mademoiselle de Mornant, but that it would be best for him to refer to her as Mademoiselle Louisa de Mornant (he can spread himself *ad lib*), that she has already attracted a good deal of attention in Tarride's *Coin du Feu*, and that, if he

thinks her bad, and would rather not take the responsibility of saying nice things about her, he can perfectly easily say "I have been asked to say, which I am only too glad to do". I don't a bit mind your mentioning that the request comes from me. Do, I beg of you, see that Sée's name, and de Mornant's, are legibly written, so that there shall be no mistake. If Sée runs into any other critics at the *Mathurins* to whom he might drop a useful word (except the *Figaro* man), that'll be all to the good, but he must tell us who it was.

Would you like me to tell Mademoiselle de M. that you are taking the matter in hand? She would be extremely grateful. Drop in on me, if you can, during the day, because I shall certainly not be going out. But I am quite sure to be sleeping late this afternoon. I keep on having the most terrible crises. I am going to try to get some sleep now. Fortunately, a crisis woke me up in time to get your letter. But for that, I shouldn't have seen it until this evening.

Yours

MARCEL

1907

My Dear Antoine:

I am gathering such strength as remains to me in the middle of an appalling crisis just to tell you how happy and grateful your delightful party made me, and that I felt all the guests

to be most appreciative of your hospitality. If you have planned to look in on me, *please* don't let it be before half-past-ten, or eleven, tonight. It will be absolutely *impossible* for me to see anybody before dinner. I hope to see you before you leave. I want to say "thank you" again.

Always

MARCEL

I had given a small dinner-party for Marcel Proust at Armenonville. The other guests were Louis de Montebello, my cousin, Anna de Noailles, and Vuillard.

1907

My Dear Antoine:

do precisely as you like; *fix* or *postpone* as you choose, as you wish. Since I shall accept—that, at least, is my not very precise intention—only one dinner, and that with you, you can name your own day. All I ask is that you should leave a note *with my concierge* before midday, saying whether the date holds or not (naturally, if my letter has been delayed, or if you were out when it arrived, your reply will be delayed, too. But *please* see that it is delivered to my concierge, so that I may not have to be wakened.) I should much prefer a private room, because the atmosphere of a public restaurant is bad for me. If, however, there are to be only two of us, or even three, a private room would, I think, be difficult. Should it, in that case, be necessary to use the restaurant, I find Durand's

less oppressive than Larue's. If it is merely a question of you and me, we might, perhaps, seek the hospitality of one of your female cousins (though that might be rather embarrassing for me because of the Tanagra statuette which I broke last summer). There is always the "Union", of course, but I must know for certain where it's to be, because of dressing. I leave it all to you, my dear Antoine. If the party is to be put off, do, all the same, let us meet for a few minutes. The horrible misprints in the article are driving me frantic. "Pierres sans *feux*" is one of a peculiarly ingenious ineptitude, because many readers might not think it a misprint at all—and so on, and so on.

Yours

MARCEL

1907

My Dear Antoine:

an evil fate seems to hang over my life! Your letter arrived a few hours after the end of a period during which I might have seen a lot of you, and precisely at the moment when the starting of the furnace (1st November)—the chimney of which backs on my bed—has provoked one of my terrible crises—which long familiarity will attenuate, but which, at the moment completely incapacitates me. I did, however, have one hour of tolerable comfort yesterday, from nine to ten, and got them to ring you (it's no longer 514 00![1]).

[1] My telephone number at that time.

There was no answer. Are there any evenings when you are engaged? (any evening, I mean, when I may be sure that you are not putting yourself out for me, but that "mecumne" or without me, you are to be at a theatre, or in a restaurant, or at home: whether, in fact, I can come round or not?).

If I am in a fit state to receive you here, I will telephone. Unfortunately, it will probably be at a time when no one will answer. In any case, after having completed a considerable job of work on which I have been engaged, I mean, this summer, before leaving the world for good, to devote my time to seeing some of those "Companions that have given all the best joy of my life on earth" (for I am terribly afraid that in the world to come I shall not be able "to meet their eyes again and clasp their hands"), and there is nobody, dear Antoine, of whom memory speaks more sweetly than of you. My solitary life allows me to recreate in thought those whom I once loved, and I always feel close to me the dear Antoine of the days when he was so good to me. But do you really remember me after all these years? I read in the papers, with a sort of fright (because I haven't yet sent him my present), that Constantin Brancovan's marriage has already taken place. Has he started on his honeymoon? How long is he to be away? I ask, so as to know when I can send it. I only hope that he got my letter of congratulations which I sent off as soon as I heard of his engagement. Good bye, my dear Antoine: I know that you laugh at my long and effusive letters. Good bye.

Yours

MARCEL

Give my love to Emmanuel.

1907

Dear Antoine:

I remember that, the first time you mentioned the word friendship as between you and me (and how happy it made me!) it was to stress the fact that, in your opinion, friendship should never be utilitarian. Yours never has been, mine always has—not in intention, but in fact. Forgive me.

Good night, dear friend

M.P.

1910

Dear Antoine:

this evening has been for me charged with emotion. Although I felt like death, I went to a concert-hall in the rue du Rocher, in order to hear Franck's Sonata, which I dearly love, and not to hear Enesco, whom I had never heard before. As things turned out, I found him admirable. The melancholy chirrupings of his fiddle, and the moaning bass, responded to the piano like the sounds made by a tree in a wind, like the mysterious response of leaves. I say all this in the hope of pleasing you, because I know how much you admire him. Then, too, he gave such freshness and form to the rondeau—which is usually played in a die-away fashion, on the ground that it is angelic. I am too tired to say more, though I have much *of importance* to tell you. Without going so far as to

approve Guiche's habit of saying—"Are you going to Madame de Ganay's 'meeting' "?—instead of "party", and of calling Saint-Marc "*baronet*" instead of "baron", I do, on the other hand, think it perfectly legitimate to use the words "squire", "home", etc, for, since they are perfectly permissible in French when there is no question of translation involved, why shouldn't they be when there is?[1]

I have long wanted to ask your advice about transposing one of the chapters of my book. But I find talking about such matters to you so tiresome, that I would rather do without your opinion.

Yours

MARCEL

[1] I was engaged on a translation of Galsworthy, and had asked Marcel's views on the use of the word "squire".

1913

Dear Antoine:

what a nuisance! I can't possibly put off Monsieur Cortin. On the other hand, I am in such a state that I shan't be able to get round to you before dinner. Nevertheless, if you are really ill, I'll manage it somehow. But can't you give me until eleven, seeing that I shan't have finished dinner before ten? At all events, I'll find some way. What *is* this sudden attack? It is very naughty of you not to reassure me, and only to send me such a very mysterious message. I am *very ill*

myself, and not at all sure that I shall be able to leave my bed. *I've got a high fever*, as well as all sorts of worries. *If* I can manage to get up and dress, I'll come round. Louis d'Albufera was going to look in after dinner, but I'll put him off. So long. What *can* be the matter with you? I am very upset at the thought that you are ill. You must be feeling very bad to shut yourself away from your ladies. The whole business makes me very miserable. It's no good asking you to come here, because I don't suppose you're going out, either. If you're uneasy about yourself, would you like papa to have a look at you?[1] I can't tell you how vexed I am at the idea of your being unwell. I have grown so used to relying on your strong constitution. I have never had any doubts about it, so I'm not going to worry. But it's just one anxiety the more.

M.P.

[1] This letter must be wrongly dated, because Proust's father died in 1903. (Translator)

1913

Dear Antoine:

if you're doing nothing this evening, I won't budge, but will look forward to a nice long visit. I don't think I like what you say about the dear, good women who look after me so cheerfully, and so unselfishly, even going to the extent, sometimes, of lending me money, though I never give them

a penny, when I want to make lavish tips to the waiters at Larue. But I don't hold it against you, because I know that you discharge your destructive thunderbolts without malice aforethought. It is only your kindnesses that are calculated (deliberate, I mean, and conscious). So, I am content to be grateful for the latter, and to bear no resentment for the former.

If what little I know is of interest to you, it is entirely at your disposal, Antoine, my dear, as is also my heart, my strength, my life, and such small degree of usefulness as I may occasionally have—in other words, all of me. Writing to you in this strain, I am naturally aware of the faint gush of emotion which inevitably accompanies vehement assertions of this sort, and I send you the warmest of warm handshakes.

MARCEL PROUST

1913

My dear Antoine:

I should be enormously grateful if you could get a message to Monsieur Ollendorff.[1] It is to this effect. Some time ago he had from me, by Picard[2] a dialogue which he had promised to print. Whether he prints it or not is a matter of complete indifference to me, but since the thing is "set" in the month of September, I'd like him, if he doesn't hurry up, to let me

[1] The Editor of *Gil Blas*.

[2] André Picard, the dramatist.

have it back at once so that I may take advantage of its vaguely topical nature to get it placed elsewhere. All this must be told him clearly and positively because, really, he is an impossible creature. My *Ruskin* was submitted to him for publication, and it was a full year before I could get it returned. If it hadn't been that he resigned from the firm, and so been compelled (or, rather, it was his successor who was compelled) to make a general clean-up, I doubt whether I should ever have set eyes again on that *Bible* of mine which he had at once so cruelly spurned and so jealously hung on to.

About that "snapshop". Louisa de Mornant took quite seriously what you probably meant as the vaguest of vague suggestions. You're the one who ought to do it. If you'd rather I took it over, nothing in the world will persuade me to sign it, because what's wanted is something incredibly vapid, a sort of pastiche of D.—"Remember this name: the day may come when the world will ring with it"—or, "she is mad about her art, and slaves at it unremittingly". I think you could do it marvellously. I shall be in to-morrow evening (by the time this reaches you, *this* evening, Saturday). But don't come during the day, because I shan't be visible, no matter how late.

All my love

MARCEL

I think it was Leygues I told you was so like Clemenceau.

1913

Dear Antoine:

forgive this brief scribble. I am in the middle of correcting my proofs, and really feel more dead than alive. It was sweet of you to write to me about that article, which was really meant only to make you laugh. As to the question of having a "turn-over" article, I would have you note (a Balzacian detail) something that has never happened in the *Figaro*, namely, that the leading-article (Jules Roche's) didn't appear at all in the table of contents, which proves that they thought it was a Ministerial statement. Besides, my article reached them only the evening before, and couldn't, because of its subject, be held over. I am not saying all this to excuse the *Figaro*, for, though the literary organs refuse everything I send them, I can scarcely regard it as lacking in literary taste to accept me! If, next time, they relegate me to the fifth page, I shall still be enchanted, because I believe that good artists ought not to insist on being starred, but should be willing to take small parts. Don't forget that I have no "position"—which is probably just as well, because, given the present fluid state of popular taste, when one quite often sees the young treating Maeterlinck and Régnier with contempt, if I *am* ever to be regarded as having some small amount of talent, the later that happens the better.

In any case, yours and Emmanuel's opinion means more to me than anything else, and so long as you like my book, I don't a bit mind nobody talking about it.

Yours, MARCEL

Please take note. If I wait a few days before answering you, you immediately say—What's the matter? Are you dead?· But I always send you four pages in reply to four lines, or rather, to four words—and those, too, quite illegible.

1913

Dear Antoine:

if I haven't written, it's not for want of thinking of you. But the last six months have been full of vexations, and not a little grief. I do hope that when you come to Paris, you'll give me a "wave of the hand". Tell Emmanuel from me that I should love to see him, too. I didn't write to him because when I post a letter I like to know where it's going. The knowledge that you like my book gives me much happiness: I had an idea that you didn't. If I had had any time to think of literary matters, I should have been well contented. People I never dared dream would read me, have written quite staggering letters. Are you never in Paris? I scarcely ever leave my bed, and, if I do, it is usually only to go to La Schola or the Concert Rouge, when they're playing Beethoven Quartets. But I'll get up for you. It was nice of you to have been so annoyed by that article of Souday's in which he criticised as faults in my French what, in fact, are printer's errors. I'll tell you what I said in reply. My letter ended like this. "You can take it from me, my dear sir, that if the retired University Professor whom you think that all publishers and newspaper editors should have on their staff, were employed

in doing nothing else than correcting my faults of grammar, he would have a good deal of spare time on his hands. He might do worse, perhaps, than use some of it to check your Latin quotations. He would not, I am sure, fail to point out that "*materiam superabat opus*" comes, not from Horace, as you say it does, but from Ovid, who used it, as a matter of fact, to express a thought diametrically the opposite of your own." The *Temps* did not print it.

Good bye for the present, my dear Antoine,
and believe me
Yours, very affectionately

MARCEL

I had asked Marcel to tell me where to find a passage on death by which I had been greatly struck.

1916

My dear Antoine:

I must apologize for not having answered you earlier (I do *not* say for not having written to *you* in answer to *your* letter, as a highly literate individual once wrote to me). Since the section of my book devoted to the subject of death has not yet been published (except for one very short passage in the N.R.F. on the death of my grandmother), I am not quite sure what you are thinking of. However, after reading through *Swann* again with an eye to your requirements (and God knows it's not easy reading!) I did find, on either page

99 or 100, a passage bearing on the profound significance of Giotto's art which contains a reference to death, the unimportance of which no doubt leapt to your malevolent eye, and was attributed by you, in kindlier mood, to my simple-mindedness. I hope you got my New Year's letter. You say nothing about it, nor yet about the origins of Carp and Majoresco, not that I much mind.

Good bye, for the present, dear Antoine. I send you a deal of affection which please share with Emmanuel, if he is still with you.

MARCEL

And what about Max's family background? I don't, you see, push your Chassang-d'Hozier principles to the point of writing "Max".

1916

My dear Antoine:

forgive me for not having answered your letter sooner. I have been suffering a good deal in body and mind. I have been thinking a lot about you in these last sad days, which remind us that the years renew themselves with all their accustomed beauties, but do not bring back those human beings who will return no more. Alas! 1916 will have its violets and apple-blossoms, and, earlier still, its frost-flowers: but never again will there be a Bertrand de Fénelon.

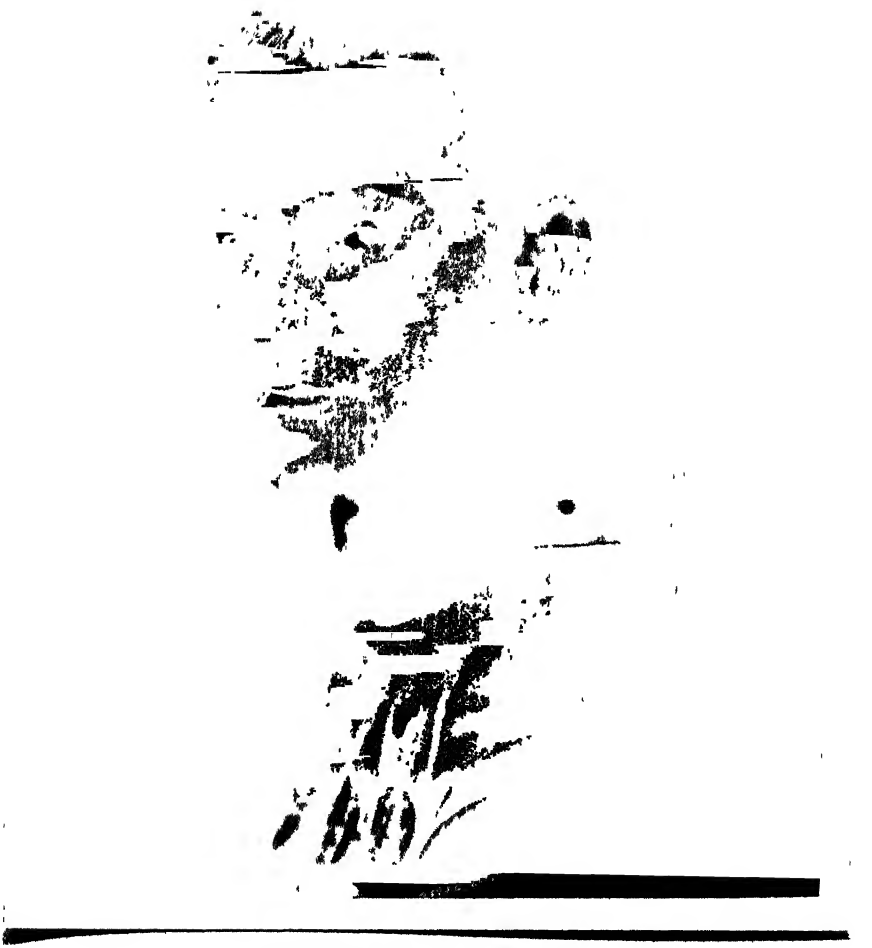
I won't write any more because I am very tired. But I send you all my love. Please give Emmanuel his share, if he is with you.

MARCEL PROUST

Does Monsieur Carp come of bad stock like Marghiloman and Take Jonescu, or of good, like Filipesco (I mean in the matter of family, because I know that in outlook he is the most obstinate of Bochophils)? What view do you take of his intelligence?

I believe more firmly than ever in our victory. All the same, I feel that certain arguments stand in need of being rejuvenated or furbished up. The argument of the "fortress" is, for instance, true, but in inverse ratio to the size of the fortress. If you multiply the sides of a polygon to infinity, it becomes impossible to distinguish it from a circumference, and so, assuming (*Horresco referens*—"Horresco" is very Rumanian isn't it?) that the Boches—which God forbid—really do conquer the world, they will be in a fortress all right, but with plenty of elbow-room. I find their present fortress a little too large for my taste. But I think that, fairly soon, we may be able to detach Poland, etc, from it, and the sooner we get to grips with the argument, the better.

MARCEL



PRINCE ANTOINE BIBESCO

I had written to Marcel Proust asking him to remind me of two phrases about which he had spoken.

1917

My dear Antoine:

forgive me for having been so long in replying. I have not been at all well, and have a great deal to vex and weary me. The passage from Montesquieu is this: "*Les vices d'Alexandre étaient extrêmes commes ses vertus; il était terrible dans la colère; elle le rendait cruel.*" I should be glad if you would refrain, so far as is possible, from passing it on to any literary gents, because I have an essay on Flaubert ready, which won't appear until later—in which it plays a pretty large part.

Don't you think that line of Racines is, as sheer writing, almost as good:

"*Pourquoi l'assassiner? Qu'a-t-il fait? A quel titre?*"?

Always

MARCEL

1917

My dear Antoine:

I haven't written to you for a long time because my eyes have been giving me a lot of trouble. But I have been thinking so much of you that your brief card gave me a feeling that I can almost describe as pleasure, though with much sadness mixed in with it. I had actually written, quite recently, to

Madame de Noailles asking her to believe, and to tell you, that certain beloved names—"Corcova"[1] for instance—are as familiar to me, and as sweet, as, say, Senlis, and infinitely more dear than Bonnétable. I added that I was in continual terror of seeing them figure in a communiqué. I blamed myself for knowing so little of others which must be very close to your heart, sanctified as they are by memories of her, or of Emmanuel, or of Princess Bibesco. What about Constantin? How my feelings go out to you at this moment. I haven't written to Constantin or to you because my eyes have been too bad. Besides, it never occurred to you to write to me at the time of the German march on Paris—and the present situation is much the same. Dear Antoine, I hope you'll do me the justice to remember—though the barest minimum of emotional tact would hardly let me do otherwise—that I never said, like some people who, apparently, thought it as simple a matter as going to Trouville—"Well, when are you coming in?". I have always told you how fully I understood your policy of staying out, and that even after what happened in Russia, it seemed to me the only possible one for you. During all the long while I haven't set eyes on you I have had frequent occasion to talk of these things, and hope that what I would have said to you, had you been here, would have sounded wise, and that you would have believed it to be dictated not only by my fear lest violence might be done to something very dear to you—which is merely an affectionate and egotistical sentiment—but by objective arguments, which are too long and too complicated to put into a

[1] My estate in Rumania.

letter. Dear Antoine, I have always held you to be the most intelligent of Frenchmen: I beg you now to believe that I am to a small extent a Rumanian, and not, I hope, one of the stupidest.

Always

MARCEL PROUST

1918

Dear Antoine:

just a line—for I am very ill—to thank you from the bottom of my heart, and to tell you that Vinteuil's Sonata is not Franck's. If you are interested (which I doubt), I will tell you (book in hand) all the musical compositions (some of them very middling) which "sat" for the Sonata. For instance, the "little phrase" is from Saint-Saëns's Sonata for piano and violin, which I am prepared to hum to you (tremble!), and the tremolo that plays above it comes from Wagner's Prelude. The opening, with its sad rise and fall, is from the Franck Sonata, and the broader movements from one of Fauré's Ballades, etc, etc:—and yet there are those who really believe that the whole thing just "dripped" off my pen.

I send my love to both the brothers

MARCEL

1918

My dear Antoine:

my thoughts are constantly with you and with Emmanuel who has sent me any number of charming cards from all over the place. He says that he is always coming across people who are reading my book, but, alas, he never says anything about reading it himself. When he gets back, I very much want to see him, just to say "thank you". What do you think of this remark of Albu's (very typical Albufera[1]—but that's not what I mean). Conversation on the telephone:

"But, my dear Louis, have you read my book?"

"Read your book—have you written one?"

"Indeed I have, Louis: I went so far as to send you a copy."

"Oh, Marcel dear, if you sent it me, then I certainly read it, but I am not at all sure that it ever reached me" (very drily).

Good bye, for the present, dear Antoine. I could go on talking to you for ever.

MARCEL

[1] The Duc d'Albufera

1919

Dear Antoine:

just a line to tell you that Céleste's husband spent all the evening trying in vain to get you on the telephone. Your English maids couldn't understand what he was saying. I have very stupidly over-tired myself, and shan't be really alive again for several days. I am particularly put out because my

affection for you has grown considerably, because I should prefer to dine almost anywhere rather than in that damp Quai Bourbon house, and because, too, it would give me enormous pleasure to see you. Dear Antoine, when are you going to be appointed Minister in Paris? I think of all the Antonescos (in other respects, nice enough fellows) and others (also very nice, especially Ghika) whom I have seen occupying that post, and then try to imagine what it would be like if *you* were there, my admired and much-loved friend (and that's not flattery).

Yours

MARCEL

1919

My dear Antoine:

forgive my silence. Ever since I moved I have had one crisis after another, and they have left me so depressed that I couldn't even autograph one of my books. Then came the last straw. The N.R.F. having sent me a number of copies, I sat down before a pile of them, meaning to write in a few. But I had dealt with no more than three when I realised that the others were all of the third edition. I am going to have the bookshops ransacked for some of the first, and, as soon as I get them will send you a copy of each. If you come across any people to whom I ought to have sent them but who have not yet received their copies (they will, when I can lay my hands on some first editions) do, please, make my excuses. For instance, Chaumeix, the Comtesse de Noailles, the

Princesse de Chimay, the Princesse de Polignac, the Comtesse Greffulhe, Barrès, etc., and, especially, Léon Blum. Do you think I can send (I have some) second or third editions?

All my respectful admiration to the Princess.

Yours

MARCEL PROUST

From the age of twenty on, I wrote a number of plays. One of them was accepted by the Théatre de l'Œuvre, and duly produced. As will be seen later, I pressed Marcel Proust into my service to get me good notices in the Press.

The only thing he ever wanted was to be of use to his friends. He was eager to be employed, and begged one to ask for his help.

On this occasion, though he needed pressing, he wrote an advance-notice (a sort of pastiche of all advance notices), did a "pen-portrait" of me, and composed an acrostic for the occasion.

I attribute the many far too kind notices which Jaloux *received entirely to his kindness.*

But he went further still. Using Reynaldo Hahn as an intermediary, he got Sarah Bernhardt to read one of my plays, though she never, in fact, produced it. Profiting from Marcel Proust's valuable advice, I succeeded in completing two pieces, Laquelle *and* Mon Héritier, *which brought me some little reputation in more than one country.*

My dear Antoine:

I read in the *Figaro*. . . .

Why don't you ever tell me what you're doing, but leave me to "find out from the public prints" . . . that a play of yours is to be produced this winter at the Odéon.

Congratulations, old man. No one will take greater pleasure in applauding your success than I.

Honestly, Antoine, I am *absolutely delighted.* More details, please.

Always

MARCEL

When my play was about to be produced, Calmette asked me to let him have an advance-notice. I knew that if I asked Marcel Proust, he would write one for me. It turned out to be a brilliant pastiche of the kind of advance-notice popular during the years immediately preceding the 1914 *war. He also did a pen-portrait of me which ought to have been used, but never was.*

My dear Antoine:

read this letter carefully. Yours made me very cross, for I have never felt more warmly towards you, nor have I ever been more anxious to help. It is tiresome in the extreme not to be able to do so, and to run the risk of seeming insincere after first talking about my friendship for you and then refusing to do what you ask, all in a single breath. What it comes to is this. At the moment it is quite impossible that I should write a signed article about your play (though I should love to do one on some other occasion). You may have noticed that my name has not appeared in any newspaper for over two years. Many dear friends, and even some of the masters to whom I owe much, have (odd though it may seem that they should want an article from me)—from a sense of delicacy I suppress their names—asked me to write about

them, which, owing to my state of health, I have always refused to do. Consequently, in spite of my weakness for you, I must say "no". By the mere fact of doing what you ask, I should mortally offend more than ten other persons (for the moment: it won't always be like that). Let me add (but this is for your ear alone, and is not particularly important, because I am sure you are *persona grata* in that quarter) certain individuals have succeeded in setting me and Calmette by the ears—though he used to be very fond of me, and this makes one difficulty (but only a temporary one) the more, though far less important than the moral scruple to which I have already referred. The alternative, and this I believe is what you would really (so much the worse for my *amour-propre!*) like best, is an *unsigned* article. Please believe that no matter how devastatingly exhausting it would be for me to write such an article (this letter is exhausting enough as it is) in my present state of health, I would do it at once if I thought I could do it well. But I have a very imperfect (though fairly accurate) memory of your play, and should first have to reread it. I won't refuse if you *really can't* find anybody else, but almost anybody would do it better, and at the cost of far less fatigue. Still, I will perform if necessary (though without putting my name to it). If you can let me off I shall be truly grateful. I'll make it up to you when things are going better with me.

What I told you (in confidence) about the *Figaro* doesn't mean that I haven't still, and to some extent, got the "*ear*" of its Editorial Board. So if you'd like me to ask the paper to do you a favour, I will, gladly (and other papers as well, if you wish), but in that case I must have your answer by

Sunday, or Monday at latest. I am too ill to sit in a theatre, even if, thanks to cafeine, I could manage to get up at all. Still, if I do manage to get up (uncertain but possible) it would give me very great pleasure to come and shake your hand after a rehearsal, or after one of the performances, on the scene—detestable for my asthma, but intoxicating for my feelings of friendship—of your labours, your struggles, and, I hope, your triumph. Couldn't you send me a pass which would let me in, some day or other when I'm feeling well, to see you? I should so like to treasure up in my memory (for literary use later) the picture of you among your interpreters, as in the book I've just begun, or to renew that first vision I ever had of you, at the Opera, with a score under your arm. Only don't be specific about the day. One can never tell with asthma.

MARCEL PROUST'S ADVANCE-NOTICE

Hearing that the *Œuvre* was about to put on a play by Monsieur Antoine Bibesco, and having called on its Director in the hope of finding out something about the work in question, I went straight to the point. "There are scenes in this play" said the Founder of the *Théatre de l'Œuvre*, which will, I think, reveal to the play-going public a dramatist who, though new to the stage, belongs to the great tradition. In the course of producing *Jaloux* I have been constantly reminded of those already distant days when the *Œuvre* was giving to the world the psychologico-sentimental dramas of Sée and Coolus. Not that it in any way resembles them. No, its own peculiar note of an urgent and painful humanism is

more reminiscent of Porto-Riche. But what gives it individuality is a superb simplicity of means. Bibesco achieves his success in three acts, and using a cast of scarcely more than three characters. . . . His play is a triumph of economy."

This talk of "triumph" could scarcely fail to whet a newspaper-man's curiosity. There is always something pretentious in trying to explore the "psychology" of a writer—or of anyone else for that matter—and I am reminded of Pushkin's saying that "the mind of another is a dark forest". But there is always a rare pleasure to be derived from chatting with a newcomer to fame, with someone who has quite recently emerged from obscurity, especially when one feels that one is in contact with a genuine writer, with an artist, with an original imagination. How did Monsieur Antoine Bibesco come to take up play-writing?—What are his views upon the drama?—In the steps of which of the masters does he tread? and What are the outstanding features of his own manipulation of the art? These are interesting questions. It is worth while trying to get them answered. So, yesterday, I approached this recruit in the army of Thespis. He gave me a kind reception and readily satisfied my curiosity.

What, I asked, had led him to choose the theatre as a literary medium?

His reply was very simple. "I think", he said, "that my love of the theatre derives from my love of life." This is not the place to discuss the reasons, whether sound or otherwise, for the contempt felt by many of our contemporary men of letters for the art of the stage, a contempt which neither Goethe—the greatest dramatic author of the 19th century, let

me say in passing—nor Dickens, shared. Few will deny that the illusion of life can nowhere be more successfully evoked than in the theatre. No matter how good a novel may be, we are never, in reading, moved to tears as we are when looking at a play. I yield to nobody in my admiration for the originality displayed by Tristan Bernard in his novels, but they never set me laughing as do the little one-act masterpieces in which he displays his charming wit.

"This feeling of yours for the theatre cannot be confined to your work as a writer. You must enjoy seeing plays as well as constructing them. Who among the dramatists of the present day are—if I may use the formula of that favourite old game of 'Preferences'—your favourites?"

"In my opinion, there are two men who stand head and shoulders above their fellows in the contemporary French theatre, Paul Hervieu, with his strongly disciplined talent, his Sophoclean sense of tragedy, and Georges de Porto-Riche, whose emotional power is reminiscent of Racine. I should never dare to claim that I am their disciple, but I do, whether they like it or not, regard them as my masters."

At this point I made so bold as to interrupt Monsieur Antoine Bibesco, for I could see that he would gladly have continued discoursing on the subject of his literary preferences, whereas, what I wanted him to do was to talk about himself. I led him back, therefore, to the subject of our interview.

"Tell me more about this play of yours, *Jaloux*. Why is it to be presented by the *Œuvre*?"

"Why the *Œuvre*? Well, the reason is psychological. It so happened that I had met Lugné, and sent him my play. Two

days later it was accepted. Had I been willing to wait six months, I could have had it put on at one of the great West End theatres. But the only really satisfying pleasures are those that come at the moment of asking. If one waits too long, there is always a danger that by the time a desire is fulfilled it has ceased to be a desire. Besides, works of art cannot afford to wait. They can never be sure of a long life, and, therefore, are impatient to be born. You ask what *Jaloux* is about—you will get the answer to that question this evening. You will find that the whole piece is dominated by a feeling that springs from very deep in me—a fear of judicial error. This particular judicial error has to do with love, a matter in which such errors are most fatal. "Nothing in the theatre is so boring as jealousy", Guitry said to me some time ago when I told him about my play. I was not, I confess, unduly discouraged by this verdict, even though it came from the eminent Director of the *Renaissance*. I remembered *l'Ecole des Femmes*, I remembered *Othello*. . . . The public will tell me this evening whether I was right or wrong. The success of my first night is on the knees of the Gods, but I have certainly had a feeling of success during rehearsal. The work involved in getting my play on to the stage has brought me much delight, and I shall never forget it. Whether I shall stir the emotions of my audience I do not know, but there can be no denying that I reduced my cast to tears. . . . That was success of a moving and memorable kind."

MARCEL PROUST
(for Serge Basset)[1]

[1] Theatrical columnist of the *Figaro*.

A PORTRAIT: ANTOINE BIBESCO

In the High Society of Paris, where his relationship with such great names as Montesquiou, Caraman-Chimay, Murat, and Noailles assures him a prominent place, he is much sought after, but feared still more. Those whose admiration of him is unqualified, and they are many, have a sure basis for feeling as they do. But he has, too, a small number of friends whose affection is shot through with uneasiness. They, too, have reason for their fears. His charming wit has a cruel strain. It would be giving a false impression to pretend that the man whose play is to be seen for the first time this evening at the *Théatre de l'Œuvre*, is kindly. But the knowledge that he is not will but stimulate the curiosity of the Paris public. People will be all eagerness to see the young author's friends and literary masters—Paul Hervieu, Georges de Porto-Riche, Tristan Bernard, Edmond Sée, Donnay. Then, too, gossip has it that the work is full—as was only to be expected—of many life-like though scarcely flattering portraits of living persons.

The fact that these portraits are of many well-known figures—that a very famous actress "sat", unwillingly and without realising it—for one of the female characters, will merely have the effect of titillating the snobbery, and stimulating the curiosity, of the audience. But now, having paid my own small tribute to an all too human malice, let me add this. The tide of expectation which has for some time been ebbing and flowing round *Jaloux* is, after all, a trivial and unimportant matter. What really counts is that the piece

itself is a psychological Comedy in the tradition of the 18th century "Comedy of Manners". It is marked throughout by a subtlety of observation, a controlled discipline of presentation, and a limpidity of style—things which, in themselves, are wholly delightful. That is no small achievement, but it by no means exhausts the play's excellencies. For suddenly—as the result of some Cartesian miracle—the intricately constructed machine becomes a thinking mind, infinitely, painfully, loving and human, full of echoes from the past, from the present, and from all eternity.

MARCEL PROUST

My dear Antoine:

wouldn't it do if someone could just put you in touch with Frank, the Director of the Gymnase (but I can't help thinking you must know him yourself), or if you could find someone in a position to bring real pressure to bear on him (and you must know better than I can do, who that someone would be)? Are you still on friendly terms with Madame Lemaire? She is closely acquainted with Monsieur Frank, and, though intimate, has considerable influence on him, or so I have reason to believe. But in that case it would be far better that you should take the initiative. I came back from Sollier's[1] some time ago, but in an even more wretched state of health. Consequently, I can't write. I believe you are wrong, if not about what Bernstein thinks, at least about his power to injure you. I will explain more at length what I mean. Come

[1] A clinic for nervous diseases. (Translator)

and see me when you get back. Just at present I am visible between five and eleven. I can't tell you whether these hours will have changed by the time you return. I am a good deal more scrupulous about replying than you are when I ask you a question.

Yours

MARCEL

The chronology of the next group of letters is obviously confused, but no attempt has been made to change the order given them by Antoine Bibesco. (Translator)

1909

Dear Antoine:

I much enjoyed seeing your play, and am delighted at the success it is having. I gather that Lugné Poe is much annoyed.

MARCEL PROUST

Wednesday Evening

My dear Antoine:

I waited for you this evening with much impatience. I did not leave the house, in order, should you have changed your mind, to be able to go tomorrow, Thursday, to see

Jaloux (that was the arrangement you first suggested, and I didn't much like it as coming too near Saturday, still, better that than nothing. . .). If you *have* changed your mind, that is to say, if I am to see *Jaloux* to-morrow, Thursday, send me a note before noon, but give instructions for it to be left downstairs, so that I shan't be wakened. Friday is impossible. It would mean that I shouldn't be able to go to the ceremony on Saturday. Were I certain to be well enough to attend the wedding on Tuesday, I shouldn't bother about the signing. But where my health is concerned no certainty is possible. Of course, if I *am* well enough on Tuesday, and *do* go to the wedding, I shall be full of regrets. But if I am ill on Tuesday, and don't go, and if I hadn't been to the signing, I should feel terribly remorseful (it would take too long to explain why).

Were it not that I should almost certainly have a crisis back-stage, after being away from home since five, I would ask you to find me a little hide-out on Saturday in the green-room or in one of the dressing-rooms. I know that that would hurt R's feelings. Is the signing really to take place on Saturday? Do you know? If it is not to be until Sunday, I could manage Friday.

Always

MARCEL

Dear Antoine:

as a result of going out the day before yesterday, I had a crisis which has continued for the past two days. And all because I breathed in a little dust. Knowing, as I do, that the whole thing is going to be a dreadful strain for me, and that the physical conditions will be the worst possible for my health, I do think that if I came to your rehearsal on Thursday, it would mean that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for me to be present on Saturday at the signing of d'Albufera's marriage contract. And then, if I can't manage to get to the wedding . . . I don't think you *can* realize how agonizing this perpetual awareness of physical powerlessness is. What it all amounts to is this: that if it were at all possible to take me along to your play this evening, *Wednesday*, that would be *much* better. I should feel very grateful. If it can't be managed, I must resign myself to going on Thursday, because I do terribly want to see it. *Send me a note in the course of the morning* (but give instructions for it to be left downstairs so that I needn't be wakened) telling me whether you want me this evening. In the event of your not wanting me to-morrow evening either, let me know that, too, this morning, because, in that case, I will go out to-day. Otherwise, I shall stay in and rest in view of to-morrow. But, as I have already said, I had infinitely rather it were to-day. This constant succession of unusual activities is going to make me most horribly ill.

Yours

MARCEL

P.S. I am feeling perfectly miserable, morally, physically

and intellectually. Do come and see me some time, but in the evening. I sleep all day.

1904

My dear Antoine:

I have just read your play.

I was deeply moved, quite overwhelmed in fact: work, work, work—it is your duty.

Try to remain as you are, perpetually revivifying acts and words in the light of creative thought, and completely abjuring convention, for what may seem no more than worldly mockery or just plain impishness, spells death to the spirit. If you go on as you are doing now, sincerely, spontaneously, and without fear or favour, I tell you, not in any religious sense, but in that of literary immortality—"This do and thou shalt live. This if thou do not do, thou shalt die (whatever die may mean) totally and irrevocably."[1]

Yours

M. PROUST

[1] Proust's English.

Thursday

My dear Antoine:

(1) I am ready to do anything you want in the matter of approaching Réjane, Franck, Deval, or as many other Directors as you like, asking them to return your play, and,

MARCEL PROUST ON HIS DEATH BED

By Dunoyer de Segonzac

at the same time, announcing an impending visit from Antoine Bibesco—unless, of course, this first failure has disgusted you for all time with my interference (you have only to drop me a line).

(2) As to the value of your play (of which I know nothing) it may be a masterpiece or it may be just muck. I cannot give an opinion on that, though such information as I have—which concerns not so much the work as the author—inclines me to augur favourably. I beg you not to have a moment's doubt or discouragement just because of the verdict of a woman who may be able to solve the difficult problem of making people who are in close contact with her believe her to be nearer twenty than sixty, and to remain hopelessly ensnared by her charm, and who has a touch of genius in her acting, but whose literary judgment (I wouldn't say this to Reynaldo) is utterly contemptible, utterly null, and based on nothing at all, or, rather, on a complete absence of feeling, thought, and sense of style. Naturally, it would be nice to have a play accepted by her, and still more, to see her act in it, but, if that happened, one might be left with the uncomfortable feeling that perhaps it wasn't quite so good as one had thought it. You are too nice to say all that yourself this evening, but some friend has got to say it for you, and with no mincing of words.

(3rd point): Don't you think it might be a good idea if some man of letters, and, more especially of the theatre, intelligent enough to understand what you're after, and stupid enough to be able to boost you (what I mean is, *ordinary* enough to have a pull in the world of commercial drama) could be got to read it, like it, talk of it, and tempt the

appetite of the expectant Managers? It seems to me that you've got the ideal type ready to your hand. I can think of someone else, too, who, though not ideal, might be the better person in the circumstances. All this is very remote from such discreet services as I can render, but also very much more effective with the theatre people, whom I don't know, and on whom I don't want to have even a hint of *personal* influence. Let me add to the list of those Directors with whom I might act as go-between (and that's all), Bartet, who is not, as a matter of fact, a Director at all, but who *has* got influence.

I gather that Reynaldo has mentioned the fact that Sarah would like another play from you, but not, presumably, *Le Bon Amant?* In that case, wouldn't it be just as well to fall back on Deval, who might otherwise feel frustrated, and, in any case, doesn't know how lucky he is?

My dear friend, you have only got to write to me. Excuse me for having been the first to break our silence, but this business began at a time when we were very close, and I thought that it would seem rather unfeeling on my part to let you have news of this seeming check only from Reynaldo. Also, I wanted you to know that Sarah's judgment is, in mathematical language, equivalent to zero, and that I am ready to serve you in this, as in everything and at all times.

Your friend

MARCEL PROUST

Dear Friend:

just after leaving you, I learned that Reynaldo's concierge had been round to me with the information that Reynaldo would be back to-morrow—in other words, "by the time this line reaches you" (theatre style)—to-day. I might have guessed it, seeing that Sarah is opening in a new play in two days' time. It at once occurred to me that Sarah is likely to be the first person Reynaldo will see, and, consequently, that I may find myself, by to-morrow evening, in possession of information bearing on what Sarah thinks of your play (though perhaps not). I am telling you all this in case you might want to arrange a meeting for to-morrow evening. Should that be your wish, I am perfectly agreeable. It may, of course, be that Reynaldo won't have seen Sarah, or not alone, or that she mayn't have said anything about *Laquelle*. At all events, I'm sending you this note. It is essential that you and I have fifteen minutes of frank explanation so that we may simplify, I won't say the future of both our lives, but at least such part of our joint lives as may be covered by (whatever the amount of space it occupies, not in time, I mean, but in extent—what a lot of gibberish!) what I may, perhaps, be allowed to call, without undue presumption, our friendship.

Yours

MARCEL

One proof of friendship is that friends should help one another. Another proof, greater and more subtle, is that friends should ask one another for help.

It was a piece of luck for me that Marcel should have begged my brother and me to help him in getting the N.R.F. to publish Swann.

He entrusted the manuscript to us, and it was decided that we should ask André Gide, my old friend Jacques Copeau, and their colleague, Schlumberger, to dinner. These three men formed the triumvirate which decided what books the Nouvelle Revue Française *should publish. The manuscript was given to Gide after dinner. A few days later I got a letter from Copeau to say that the N.R.F. did not see its way to undertaking* Du Côté de chez Swann. *The following letters have to do with this attempt of ours.*

My dear Antoine:

here is the only copy of *Swann* in existence. Give it to Gide and Copeau to read, but do beg them to let you have a quick decision.

Here are a few explanatory notes on my novel. You know it already, but they may be of assistance to the "readers".

Du Côté de chez Swann is the first part of a novel which will have as its general title, *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu.* I should have liked to publish the whole book at once, but that would have meant running to too great a length. Works in several volumes are no longer popular with publishers. There are novels the action of which is brief and the number of characters small. That is not my idea of a novel. There is plane geometry and there is spatial geometry. For me, a novel deals not only with plane psychology but with psychology

in space and time. I have attempted to isolate the invisible substance which we call time. But, in order to do this, I have had to show the experience recorded as extended in time. My hope is that when the reader reaches the end of the book he will realise what it is that I have tried to do. Some small incident, trivial in itself, will show how long a time has elapsed, and the beauty of the whole will resemble that of certain pictures on which the years have left a patina.

Like a town which, from a train that twists and turns, we see now on our right, now on our left, the aspects of one single character, so handled that they seem like those of successive and different characters, will produce—but only because they have been so handled—the sensation of time passing. Certain of my personages will show, at a later stage, as quite different from what they seemed to be at the beginning of the book, and from what the reader believed them to be—as frequently happens in life. It is not only that *they* will appear again and again in the course of the work, seen from different angles, as in some of Balzac's cycles, but that one character in particular will be so treated. Regarded from this point of view, my book might have the appearance of a sequence of novels of the unconscious. They are not "Bergson" novels, because the whole of the work is dominated by a distinction which not only is absent from Bergson's philosophy, but actually contradicts it.

Voluntary memory, which is an affair of the eyes and the mind, gives us a vision of the past which is essentially untruthful. But when a smell or a taste, re-experienced in circumstances quite different from those in which it first impinged upon our consciousness, revive in us a sense of the

past, we realize, in spite of ourselves, how different that past was from what we thought we remembered, from what our conscious memory had daubed, like bad painters, with lying colours. In this first volume, the narrator, the "I" (who is not myself) suddenly recovers the lost years, the gardens of his youth, and a whole gallery of forgotten persons, in the taste of a mouthful of tea in which he finds fragments of broken cake. No doubt he had had a conscious memory of these things and persons, but he had never before seen them in their true colours, their true shapes. I have made him say that, as in the Japanese game which consists in wetting small pieces of paper, and seeing them lengthen and twist on contact with the water, and turn into flowers, so, from his cup of tea emerged the persons he once knew, gardens, flowers, the village folk with their houses, the Church, and, in fact, all Combray and its surroundings, all of them, town, garden and the rest, taking on form and solidity.

I believe that it is only in involuntary memory that the artist should seek the raw material of his work. First, because the objects thus remembered, precisely because their recall *is* involuntary, because they appear of their own volition and in response to some point of resemblance between two separated moments of time, alone carry the stamp of authenticity. Secondly, in their reconstruction of the past, they give us exactly the right dosage of memory and forgetfulness. Finally, because they restore to us the same sensation in differing circumstances, they free it from the contingent, and present us with the extra-temporal essence. Chateaubriand and Baudelaire both practised this method. My novel is not composed rationally. Its smallest elements have been furnished

by my sensibility. When first I came on them within myself, I did not understand their message, and found it as difficult to give them intelligible form as it would be to explain intellectually the meaning of musical themes.

Style is not a matter of embellishment, as some people think. It is not even a matter of technique. It is as colour is to painters, a quality of vision, a personal revelation of the universe, the universe as we see it but as others don't. The pleasure which the artist gives us is the pleasure of getting to know one universe the more. How, this being so, can certain writers declare that they have done their best to have no distinctive style at all? That is something I don't understand. I hope you can make your friends understand my explanations.

Yours

MARCEL PROUST

Proust, my brother and I all received Jacques Copeau's reply at the same time. The N.R.F. had decided against publishing Du Côté de chez Swann.

My dear Antoine:

it would take too long to tell you about the N.R.F., and be too difficult, in a letter. The long and short of it is that they will neither publish the book nor print an extract from it in the magazine. I ought at once, on receiving Copeau's answer (it was some time in late November, I think) to have written back (he said that he had read me with "sustained interest"—but I really don't know how much meaning to attach to this N.R.F. formula) asking for the return of my extract. But just then my health was at its worst. Since Copeau gave as his reason for refusing to make use of it, the fact that he hadn't an inch of free space available up to the date I gave him (1st February), and I am now sure that the book won't appear (at the earliest) before May, I thought of telling him that I should be perfectly willing for the extract to appear in the May number. But though, on the one hand, May is later than February, on the other, I let three months go by without making the suggestion. What, however, chiefly weighs with me is, as I told you, that I don't know whether his letter to me wasn't just a piece of publisher's politeness intended to disguise the fact that he didn't really like the extract.

In my uncertainty, I spoke, last week, to Emmanuel, and he is very sweetly going to have a frank talk with Copeau, explaining that the margin of time now at my disposition is greater than it was. Fasquelle won't hear of volumes as long as I think necessary for the proper presentation of my work, and I have, therefore, relieved him of the manuscript, which will now almost certainly appear over Ollendorff's imprint. I may, perhaps, let Fasquelle have a volume of collected

articles as a consolation prize. But I am afraid that Gallimard may think that I was bluffing when I talked about Fasquelle. I ought to have mentioned this to Emmanuel, so that Copeau shouldn't think me a liar, but I forgot. I am much too tired to write to him (Emmanuel, I mean, as well as Copeau). Every letter I have to write reduces me to the condition of a corpse. Just now, looking through my old articles with the idea of perhaps sending them to Fasquelle, I came on the one about Van Blarenberghe, and it was with some emotion that I saw, printed above it, the Contents List for the following day's Supplement. It contained the name of Prince Antoine Bibesco. This "brotherhood" in arms pleased me. Alas, it is also, in the absence of warmth, often the duty of our contemporaries to encourage our fledgeling wings. Blanche has contributed two charming articles to the *Revue de Paris*. He seems to be a little uncertain about Denis, Vuillard and Forain, and less favourably disposed towards them than formerly. . . .

Affectionately yours

MARCEL

1913

Dear Emmanuel:

how kind you are, and how grateful I am. You mention a letter of Copeau's, but your envelope contained nothing but one of your own cards. Most probably you forgot to enclose Copeau's letter, unless, of course, I took my post with me

when I went out (as I did the other day in hurrying over to you) and dropped it. But that I think is not very likely. It is much more probable that you forgot it. In any case, it doesn't matter, because what you said made everything perfectly clear. I wrote to him at the same time as I wrote to you, begging him to return my manuscript (because after this long delay I am in a great hurry), and pointing out that it was he who had refused the suggestion I made to have the book published at my own expense. As I told Antoine, I was prepared to pay anything they asked. I hope, therefore, that he won't accuse me of avarice. There is all the less reason for him to do so, seeing that I should have got a very good price from the *Figaro* for the same extracts, and also from the *Temps* (but it is no use reminding him: the matter is now closed).

Always

MARCEL PROUST

This disappointment brought with it one consolation. René Blum, whom Marcel knew through us, took a hand, and the first edition of Swann *was published. It had a considerable success.*

All the same, Marcel was very anxious that the remaining sections of the book should bear the imprint of the Nouvelle Revue Française.

Dear Antoine:

I have been wondering whether I can in decency get free from my first publisher. I shall say nothing to the N.R.F. until

I am quite sure that I am morally at liberty to approach them.

In any case, what you have done—and very kind of you it was to do it—in no way embarrasses me, because, if the N.R.F. refuses, everything will go on as before, and if they accept, and if between now and then I can leave my bed and decide what I can, and cannot, do, I will let them know whether I feel at liberty to agree to their offer. My hesitation has nothing to do with the money side of the business, because my present publisher pays me, whereas it is I who would be paying the N.R.F.

The whole thing seems to me to be completely unimportant from the literary point of view. But I subordinate the literary point of view to the decency and correctness of my attitude to those who have always been kind to me. Please accept my heartfelt thanks. You are doing me a great service.

Yours

MARCEL PROUST

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